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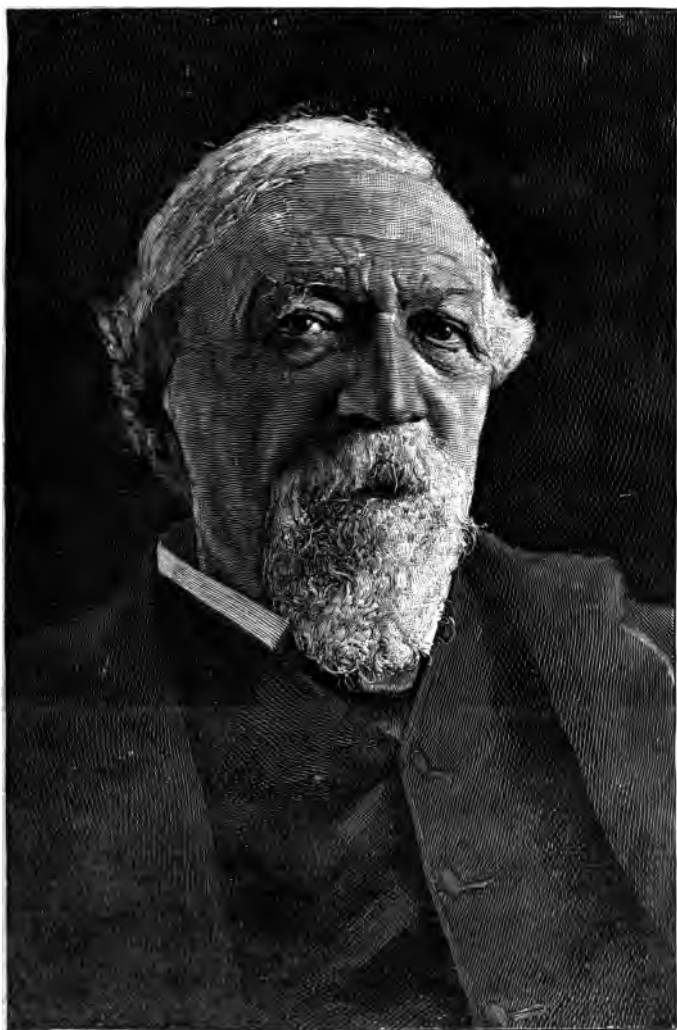
To the

Rev: J. R. Parkyn

with every good wish

W. W. T. Hope

16/1/99.



[From a Photograph.]

ROBERT BROWNING.

BORN 7TH MAY, 1812.

DIED 12TH DECEMBER, 1889.

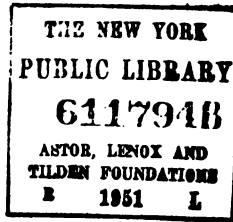
1637

STUDIES
OF SOME OF
ROBERT BROWNING'S
POEMS

BY
FRANK WALTERS
AUTHOR OF "STUDIES OF SOME OF SHAKSPERE'S PLAYS"

London
SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION
ESSEX HALL, ESSEX STREET, STRAND, W.C.

1893



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Thou hast
Life, then—wilt challenge life for us: our race
Is vindicated so, obtains its place
In thy ascent, the first of us; whom we
May follow, to the meanest, finally,
With our more bounded wills.

Sordello, Book I.

TO
MY WIFE

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Robert Browning's Poems.

CHAPTER I.

LITERARY LIFE.

Why crown whom Zeus has crowned in soul before?
Balaustion's Adventure.

I.—PARENTAGE.

ROBERT BROWNING was born in London, May 7th, 1812. His father was engaged in business, but found leisure for large intellectual culture; he had the learning of a scholar and the tastes of an artist. We have a significant picture of him nursing his baby son in the study, singing him to sleep with the Greek cadences of one of Anacreon's hymns. The poet always held his good father in reverent affection, and confessed that, comparing his own advantages with the struggles of so many writers, he had no reason to boast of his achievements. In every respect Robert Browning was fortunate in the environment of his early life. His mother was a refined woman, deeply religious, and profoundly moved by poetry and music. We may

gather the beauty of her character from the remark of a friend, that she had no need to go to heaven, because she made heaven wherever she was. Her influence over her son must have been one of the finest elements in the formation of his character; he always spoke of her with tenderest emotion, saying: "She was a divine woman." His earliest experience of the power of music came to him one day, when, quite a child, he was drawn into a room by the sound of a piano; he found his mother playing some piece which overcame him with such strong feeling, that he threw himself upon her breast in a passion of tears. These two stories of his early days have deep interest for us in the study of the great poet who gave us a noble transcription from the Greek in *Balaustion's Adventure*, and described, so sublimely, the divine power of music in *Abt Vogler*.

2.—FIRST PUBLISHED POEM.

Until he was seventeen, Browning had a private education; in 1829, he began to attend classes at University College. As a boy he showed the versatility of his genius by writing verses, studying music, and practising modelling. But, very soon, poetry became his chief pursuit; and his father gave him freedom to devote himself entirely to literature. At first, he had been fascinated by the stormy passion of Byron, but when he was about fourteen, he passed through an intellectual new-birth by an introduction to the works of Keats and Shelley. These two great poets had a profound and permanent influence upon his mental

development; the glowing sensuousness of Keats and the sublime idealism of Shelley form the warp and woof of poems in which realism and transcendentalism are woven into one matchless fabric. After many attempts, in 1833 *Pauline* was published; and, for a young poet, it was full of the highest promise. The poem displays profound intellectual power, a boundless reserve of mighty passion, and a most valuable experience of religion as a personal reality. Here we learn his enthusiasm for Shelley, of whom he says :

Sun-treader, life and light be thine for ever !

* * * * *

The air seems bright with thy past presence yet,
But thou art still for me as thou hast been
When I have stood with thee as on a throne
With all thy dim creations gathered round
Like mountains, and I felt of mould like them,
And with them creatures of my own were mixed,
Like things half-lived, catching and giving life.

* * * * *

E'en in my wildest dreams,
I proudly feel I would have thrown to dust
The wreaths of fame which seemed o'erhanging me,
To see thee for a moment as thou art.

His passion for Shelley is also expressed in *Memorabilia* in the opening of *Sordello*. In one place he foretells his almost omniscient sympathy with every act, condition, and motive of human character :—

I cannot chain my soul : it will not rest
In its clay prison, this most narrow sphere :
It has strange impulse, tendency, desire,
Which nowise I account for nor explain,
But cannot stifle, *being bound to trust*
All feelings equally, to hear all sides.

We can also trace the process in which outward events not only happened to him, but, by means of an instant receptivity, became organic elements of his spiritual being. Early in life he had seen a picture of Andromeda chained to a rock; this is how he speaks of its influence upon him :—

Andromeda !

And she is with me : years roll, I shall change,
But change can touch her not—so beautiful
With her fixed eyes, earnest and still, and hair
Lifted and spread by the salt-sweeping breeze,
And one red beam, all the storm leaves in heaven,
Resting upon her eyes and hair, such hair,
As she awaits the snake on the wet beach
By the dark rock and the white wave just breaking
At her feet ; quite naked and alone ; a thing
I doubt not, nor fear for, secure some god
To save will come in thunder from the stars.

But especially is *Pauline* significant as indicating young Browning's religious sympathies. Of Christ, he says :—

O thou pale form, so dimly seen, deep-eyed !

* * * * do I not
Pant when I read of thy consummate power,
And burn to see thy calm pure truths out-flash
The brightest gleams of earth's philosophy ?

And, in connection with the full expansion of the thought in *Easter Day*, these lines are of great interest :—

My God, my God, let me for once look on thee
As though nought else existed, we alone !
And as creation crumbles, my soul's spark
Expands till I can say,—Even from myself
I need thee and I feel thee and I love thee.

I do not plead my rapture in thy works
For love of thee, nor that I feel as one
Who cannot die : but there is that in me
Which turns to thee, which loves or which should love.

Pauline cannot be too deeply studied by us, as we endeavour to explore the genius of Browning.

3.—PARACELSUS : STRAFFORD : SORDELLO.

When Browning was about twenty-one years of age he commenced a course of travels through Europe. During his tour he visited Italy, and all his readers are familiar with the priceless treasures of wisdom and experience he gathered in that country. The attractions of Asolo, especially, are immortalised in his poems; in this white city, between the mountains and the Lombard plain, Pippa spent her innocent childhood, and in its suburbs she sang her songs; while it was "our delicious Asolo" that gave the name of *Asolando* to the volume published when the poet was on his death-bed.

It was the publication of *Paracelsus*, in 1835, that established his literary reputation, and secured him the friendship of many distinguished men. The young poet had no more ardent admirer than Mr. W. J. Fox, minister of South Place Chapel, Finsbury, who had already discerned the genius of the anonymous author of *Pauline*. In *Paracelsus*, the traditions of the famous scientific mystic are used to describe the development of certain moods of mind; in matchless verse we are told how a great soul wrestled with some of the most perplexing problems of life. Although there is little

of the dramatic element in the poem, yet Paracelsus, Festus, Michal, and Aprile excite our interest as clearly defined types of character. But we chiefly recall individual passages of glowing beauty, superb passion, and magnificent description. The poem is also significant as indicating Browning's intuitive foresight of modern physical discovery, and in many places we find how science can afford impulse for the loftiest flight of song. There is one passage, in part v., of marvellously sustained power, in which the changes of cosmic evolution and the procession of the punctual seasons are described as unfolding a divine purpose and ministering to the blessedness of the Creator. Amidst the strife of material forces, as they lay the deep, dark foundation of the universal temple,

God tastes a pleasure in their uncouth pride!

While, in the loveliness of the procreant earth and the joy of living creatures,

God renews

His ancient rapture.

The passionate faith in immortality finds expression in the lines :—

Truly there needs another life to come !
If this be all—(I must tell Festus that)
And other life await us not—for one,
I say 'tis a poor cheat, a stupid bungle,
A wretched failure. I, for one, protest
Against it, and hurl it back with scorn !

Amongst the many touches of human feeling, perhaps none is more pathetic than the incident of Michal's death, which prompts from Paracelsus the cry :—

And she is gone ; sweet human love is gone !
 'Tis only when they spring to heaven that angels
 Reveal themselves to you ! they sit all day
 Beside you, and lie down at night by you
 Who care not for their presence, muse or sleep,
 And all at once they leave you and you know them !
 We are so fooled, so cheated.

Very appropriately, Browning spoke of the scenes in Paracelsus as so many stars, which the co-operating imagination of the reader must convert into the scattered lights of one constellation—a Lyre or a Crown.

The next great poem was an English historical drama, *Strafford*, which was acted at Covent Garden theatre, in 1837, Macready and Miss Helen Faucit taking part in the production. The tragedy centres in Strafford's unwavering loyalty to a false and treacherous king ; Pym represents patriotic resistance to the encroachments of the Crown ; and in his hour of ruin the royalist begins to suspect that his devotion to Charles has been treason to his Country. The indomitable loyalty of Strafford rises into a sublime generosity in the closing scene, when he pleads with Pym to spare the King. Pym will make no promise ; the safety of a faithless monarch must not be secured by imperilling a nation's freedom ; and the play ends with the patriot's cry :—

England,—I am thine own ! Dost thou exact
 That service ? I obey thee to the end.

In 1840 appeared *Sordello*. Those students, who have once mastered this difficult poem, feel amply repaid for their toil, and turn again and again to its pages to renew their acquaintance with its gems of

poetry. Especially is the work of great interest, because it gives us Browning's convictions as to the poet's vocation, and his relations to the two worlds of Nature and Man. In Book I. we have no doubt to which class of poets, there described, the author himself belongs. The finest poet is not only ravished by the glory of the world, pouring out his being in passionate worship before the altar of supreme Beauty, —he also, in the very ecstasy of joy, maintains a solemn reverence for his own soul, as the focus where all the streams of universal life combine into higher forms of power, and where they find, at last, the full interpretation of their divine purpose. The outward revelation of Nature instantly prompts the inner self-revelation of spiritual consciousness. As Goethe would have said, reverence for all we see above us, around us, beneath us, culminates in reverence for ourselves as the highest that God and Nature have produced.

So, homage, other souls direct
Without, turns inward.

Such a soul, secure in its own integrity of mind and heart and will, can never be satiated nor surprised by the most stupendous manifestations of wisdom and beauty and power which the physical world can give; from every earthly object it is able to .

Soar to Heaven's complexest essence, rife
With grandeurs, unaffronted to the last,
Equal to being all.

And, with great clearness, does Browning indicate the two dangers which beset such a soul; the peril of

enervation, through the despair of ever making the finite life adequate to the achievement of boundless aspirations ; and the yet worse peril of trying, at once, to embody the Perfect Ideal in an imperfect existence, of forcing the issues of eternity within the limitations of time,

Thrusting in time eternity's concern.

We know how nobly our poet overcame these temptations ; one of the most important lessons he teaches is that man is a progressive creature, lured by an Infinite Ideal, which can only be approximately realised through a series of strenuous efforts, whereby the conditions of an earthly life are made the discipline of an endless growth.

4.—“BELLS AND POMEGRANATES.”

During the six years following the publication of *Sordello*, a series of poems was published under the title *Bells and Pomegranates*. The name was suggested by the decorations on the garments of the Hebrew High Priest, and was used by Browning to suggest the mingling of music and wisdom, of poetry and thought. Some of the poems are dealt with in the following pages ; *Pippa Passes* was the first in the list of a number of splendid creations. Among the shorter poems were *In a Gondola*, *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, *How they brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix*, *The Flight of the Duchess*, *The Boy and the Angel*, *Saul (Part I.)*. This period of Browning's literary career is marked by the development of his dramatic power. The tragic *nodus* of *King Victor and*

King Charles is the complicated relationship between a father and son; the son has to choose between filial impulse and patriotic responsibility. King Victor seeks to evade the disastrous results of his own tyranny and treachery, by resigning his crown to his son. Charles, supported by his noble wife, Polyxena, accepts the terrible responsibility; and, by his wise government, saves the country from impending ruin. When he finds the disasters are thus averted, Victor attempts to recover the throne; he has used his son for his own purposes, and now that his strategy is successful, he is resolved to resume his authority in the state. But Charles has discovered his father's perfidy; and, for the sake of the country, resists the plot against his government. When, however, the old man is brought as a prisoner before his son, filial affection prevails over political expediency, and Charles resigns the crown. Then there dawns upon Victor the contrast between his own treachery and his son's magnanimity; his heart breaks, and he dies with the confession of his guilty life, and yet with an unconquerable pride that he ends his life in the dignity of kingship. There is profound pathos in the words which burst from his lips, as he passes away from the splendid ambitions of earth into the deepening darkness of death:—

God of eclipse and each discoloured star,
Why do I linger then?

Colombe's Birthday represents the conflict of love and duty in Valence who passionately worships Colombe, and yet is bound to represent to her the lofty position

which awaits her if she will become the bride of Berthold. Nothing, surely, can be finer than the scene in which Colombe discerns how she is beloved by the young advocate; for a time she is rent by conflicting emotions; but, at last, she resigns the duchy, and finds that love is better than worldly pomp. One passage, in this play, must be quoted, in which Valence thinks he is losing Colombe for ever, and yet he declares that the very memory of having met with her will exalt his life for ever:—

Oh, what amplest recompense !
Is the knowledge of her nought? the memory, nought?
—Lady, should such an one have looked on you,
Ne'er wrong yourself so far as quote the world,
And say, love can go unrequited here !
You will have blessed him to his whole life's end—
Low passions hindered, baser cares kept back,
All goodness cherished where you dwelt and dwell.
What would he have ? He holds you—you, both form
And mind, in his,—where self-love makes such room
For love of you, he would not serve you now
The vulgar way,—repulse your enemies,
Win you new realms, or best, in saving you
Die blissfully—that's past so long ago !
He wishes you no need, thought, care of him—
Your good, by any means, himself unseen,
Away, forgotten !—He gives that life's task up,
As it were.

The Blot on the Scutcheon is a domestic tragedy in which the disaster is precipitated by a conflict of youthful passion, aristocratic pride, and fatal misunderstanding. This play is a striking instance of the method in which genius can deal with actions and events which traverse the bounds of conventional order,

creating for our sympathetic imagination a realm of Art which accepted codes of judgment are utterly inadequate to explore.

The hero of *Luria* is one of Browning's noblest characters; he is a soldier who has given his services to the city of Florence; but, finding himself entangled by Italian treachery, he sacrifices his life rather than stain himself with baseness and disloyalty. Leading the army of the Florentines against Pisa, he is surrounded by spies who in the moment of victory intend to impeach him for an ambition which threatens the independence of his adopted city. When he has won the battle he is told of the plot, and is entreated by his friends to transfer his allegiance to the Pisans and inflict a well-merited vengeance on Florence. But, with steadfast will, he maintains his integrity; and in his death both friends and foes discover the splendid magnanimity of this single-hearted, unselfish man whom they have been trying to use as the tool of their intrigues. In one very notable speech, *Luria* contrasts the intuitional feelings of his native East with the subtleties of thought through which the Italian mind works its way to conviction and decision:—

My own East!

How nearer God we were! He glows above
With scarce an intervention, presses close
And palpitatingly, His soul o'er ours!
We feel Him, nor by painful reason know!
The everlasting minute of creation
Is felt there; Now it is, as it was Then;
All changes at His instantaneous will,
Not by the operation of a law

Whose maker is elsewhere at other work!
 His hand is still engaged upon His world—
 Man's praise can forward it, Man's prayers suspend,
 For is not God all-mighty?—to recast
 The world, erase old things and make them new,
 What costs it him?

5.—MARRIAGE.

In his personal history the year 1846 was the most notable for Browning, for it was then that Elizabeth Barrett became his wife. The great poetess was in delicate health, and till her death they lived in Italy, where their only child, Robert, was born at Florence in 1849. There were fourteen years of an almost perfect married life; in 1861, the Poet was left a widower; but we know how much of his inspiration was given by her continued spiritual presence with him. In one poem, *A Wall*, he describes in exquisite symbols how all the obstacles of change and death have not deprived him of the sense of her undying influence upon his spirit. In *One Word More*, he begs to give his wife some proof of his love which shall be unique, a sacred gift quite different from the things which the world reviews and criticises. The painter, Rafael, made "a century of sonnets" when he learnt to love a woman; the poet Dante, moved by his passion for Beatrice, painted the picture of an angel; and Browning thinks that there is a sacredness about those sonnets and that picture which transcends the power and beauty of all the productions which they bequeathed to the world. He, the dramatic poet, cannot do anything more than

dedicate his verse to his beloved ; but, for her sake, he will, for a moment, drop the mask of dramatic utterance, and attune his lines to a sweeter tone, as he speaks to her directly of his pure devotion. If the Moon were to love a mortal, she would surely desire to turn her new side to that one elect soul, and reveal that mysterious face which not even the most favoured men have ever seen. So the world will only know his wife as "Poetess;" but he knows how the wife transcends the artist; he has been favoured by the vision of that Ideal Womanhood embodied in her character :—

Think of you Love !

This to you—yourself my moon of poets !
 Ah, but that's the world's side, there's the wonder,
 Thus they see you, praise you, think they know you.
 There, in turn I stand with them and praise you,
 Out of my own self, I dare to phrase it.
 But the best is when I glide from out them,
 Cross a step or two of dubious twilight,
 Come out on the other side, the novel
 Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,
 Where I hush and bless myself with silence.

But his passion rises into its clearest strain in that ineffable aspiration which closes the first part of *The Ring and the Book*, where he supplicates strength to accomplish his work from those "realms of help" where "Lyric love, half-angel and half-bird" has found a heavenly sanctuary. "Never" he protests :—

Never may I commence my song, my due
 To God who best taught song by gift of thee,
 Except, with bent head and beseeching hand—
 That still, despite the distance and the dark,

What was, again may be ; some interchange
Of grace, some splendour once thy very thought,
Some benediction anciently thy smile :
—Never conclude, but raising hand and head
Thither where eyes, that cannot reach, yet yearn
For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,
Their utmost up and on,—so blessing back
In those thy realms of help, that heaven thy home,
Some whiteness, which, I judge, thy face makes proud,
Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall.

6.—“MEN AND WOMEN.”

Previous to the production of *The Ring and the Book* Browning published some of his most characteristic poems in two volumes, called *Men and Women*. Among these are his poems on Art, in which we can trace the deep influence of his Italian studies. In many of these poems he exhibits the various tragedies and triumphs of the love of man and woman ; especially in *Any Wife to any Husband* and *James Lee's Wife* the subtle complications and vital problems of the marriage bond are analysed with the profoundest insight. In *An Epistle of Karshish* we have an epilogue to the narrative in the Gospel of John recording the resurrection of Lazarus. An eastern physician, in his travels meets with Lazarus, and writes to a friend to tell him of this strange man for whom the blazon of eternity has obliterated the distinctions of time, and reduced the pride of this world to an empty show. He professes to ridicule the wild story that Lazarus tells about an Incarnate God who, years ago, lived in Palestine, and raised him from the dead ; and yet the sceptic cannot help betraying how he is fascinated by

the very conception of a Deity who reveals his LOVE in human attributes as clearly as he has revealed his POWER in natural forces.

The very God ! think, Ahib ; dost thou think ?
 So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too—
 So, through the thunder comes a human voice
 Saying, " O heart I made, a heart beats here !
 Face, My hands fashioned, see it in Myself.
 Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of Mine,
 But love I gave thee, with Myself to love,
 And thou must love Me who have died for thee ! "
 The madman saith He said so : it is strange.

Saul, Cleon, and Caliban on Setebos manifest Browning's intense interest in the problems of theistic faith and the immortal hope. *Rabbi Ben Ezra* gives us some of Browning's deepest convictions on the meaning of individual life ; the Rabbi describes life as the process by which the Divine Fashioner of our souls is moulding us " 'mid this dance of plastic circumstance " into some consummate completeness. Life's triumphs and failures must only be judged by their spiritual results ; what have outward events *made of us ?*—that is the supreme test of the value of our earthly career. The wheel of time, upon which our being is spun, can only accomplish the providential purpose by moulding us into vessels meet for the Master's use. In two verses Browning emphasises his repugnance to that dualistic asceticism which renounces the claims of the flesh in order to win redemption for the spirit.

For pleasant is this flesh ;
 Our soul in its rose-mesh
 Pulled ever to the earth, still yearns for rest ;

Would we some prize might hold
To match those manifold
Possessions of the brute—gain most, as we did best !

Let us not always say
“Spite of this flesh to day
I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole !”
As the bird wings and sings,
Let us cry “All good things
Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh
helps soul !”

7.—LATER POEMS.

The Ring and the Book appeared in the years 1868-9 ; I have tried to express my sense of the power of this astonishing poem in the succeeding chapter. During the following years the Poet's long study of Greek Dramatists resulted in *Balaustion's Adventure*, *Aristophane's Apology*, and *The Agamemnon of Aeschylus* ; while his relentless analysis of human passion and crime bore fruit in the terrific tragedies of *The Inn Album* and *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country*. In *La Saisiaz* the question of immortality still fascinates Browning's mind, and its affirmative solution receives the finest justification. In the *Pacchiarotto* volume he included the famous ballad, *Hervé Riel*. In the same volume appeared a remarkable poem, *Fears and Scruples*, dealing in a very brief but most impressive manner with some difficulties of theistic faith. Here, also, we again find striking illustrations of Browning's inexhaustible interest in the relations of men and women, with their endless mysteries of love and hatred, aspiration and despair ; *Numphroleptos*, *Bifurcation*, *St. Martin's Summer*, *A Forgiveness*, are all

powerful descriptions of various forms of sexual relationship. The poems of the last ten years of the poet's life were published under the titles, *Dramatic Idyls*, *Jocoseria*, *Ferishtah's Fancies*, *Parleyings with certuin People*, and *Asolando* issued the month of his death. In these works he chiefly emphasised the views of life which had become familiar through his earlier writings; and his latest productions display not only undiminished intellectual power, but, at times, also ring with that clear lyric note which so often rises into purest music above the complicated clouds of moral strife and mental subtlety.

8.—CONCLUSION.

Mrs. Browning died in 1861; and for the remainder of his life, the Poet's permanent home was in London, though he made frequent visits to Italy. His son grew up to manhood under his care, and for twenty-three years his sister was also a member of his household. During a visit to Venice, late in the year 1889, the Poet was attacked by fatal illness. It is gratifying to know that, before the end came, he received the news from England of the welcome that had been given to his new volume, *Asolando*, and almost his last words were an expression to his son of the pleasure the tidings gave him. His illness was very short, there was scarcely any suffering, and he peacefully passed away on the 12th December. Florence and Venice both desired to take charge of the sacred dust of the poet who had written:—

Open my heart and you will see
Graved inside of it "Italy."

But England claimed the body of her illustrious son, and it was buried in Westminster Abbey, 31st December, 1889. In the *Epilogue* to his last volume he bids his friends not to pity him when he passes through the shadow of death, but rather to bid him god-speed as, with dauntless courage, he presses on to some new work in unseen worlds:—

Greet the unseen with a cheer!

Bid him forward, breast and back as either should'be,
"Strive and thrive!" cry "Speed,—fight on, fare ever
There as here!"

CHAPTER II.

RELIGION AND ETHICS.

Give me a spirit that on life's rough sea
Loves t' have his sails filled with a lusty wind,
Even till his sail-yards tremble, his masts crack,
And his rapt ship run on her side so low
That she drinks water, and her keel plows air.
There is no danger to a man that knows
What life and death is; there's not any law
Exceeds his knowledge; neither is it lawful
That he should stoop to any other law.
He goes before them, and commands them all,
That to himself is a law rational.

George Chapman, Byron's Conspiracy, iii. 1.

1.—BROWNING A RELIGIOUS TEACHER.

ROBERT BROWNING was a profound philosopher as well as a great poet; and both his philosophy and his poetry were consecrated by religion. This fact is very stimulating to us who are so much interested in the maintenance of spiritual faith. His intellect was as lofty as his heart was large; he explored every realm of thought, feeling and enterprise; I do not think we have had a man of finer intellect amongst us during this century; and it is encouraging to find, in the writings of such a man, noble vindications of the primary

truths of religion. We are told that in some neighbouring countries men of the best intellectual power are drifting away from faith. However it may be on the Continent, certainly in this country religion has not yet become the concern alone of superstitious women and ignorant children. To Browning, man's spiritual being is the centre around which facts of nature and events of history move, by which they are explained, from which they receive illumination. Until we realise this, these poems must be dark riddles to us.

2.—THE INTERPRETATION OF NATURE.

For instance, he always views nature in its relation to human feeling and its service in human discipline; the facts and laws of physical science are merely curious details, more or less interesting, which can never, for a moment, come into conflict with immediate and personal spiritual experience. There are two aspects under which two different orders of mind view the universe. One thinker regards it as *our* world, relative to our faculties, and even created and sustained by our perceptive and rational powers. Another regards it as an objective sphere of creative energy, the offspring of an inscrutable Power, a realm in which man appears as one insignificant effect of the unknown Cause of all things. Now, though he does not ignore the second, it is the first of these aspects which Browning chiefly adopts. The whole universe of physical power to him is as *nothing* compared with one spark of conscious life. He refuses to believe that the huge masses of rock you call mountains, and the accumulations of water you call

oceans are more wonderful than the human soul, through which alone they become transfigured by attributes of marvel and mystery. He has no patience with certain poets who have tried to make man look mean and paltry in comparison with the vastness of the material world. When you apostrophise the rolling ocean as so much grander than the human beings it so often drowns, it is as though you extolled the giant as superior to the philosopher because of his weight of flesh and strength of muscle.

And one reason why Browning regards the external world as subordinate to conscious man, is the grand discovery that every fraction of power is subservient to the purposes of eternal wisdom and the destinies of infinite love. Power, in itself, is not divine; it may be feared, it cannot be worshipped. Unless the secret of the world be LOVE, man is more godlike than a whole universe of force. For, as he finely says:—

A loving worm, within its clod,
Were diviner than a loveless God
Amidst his worlds.

If the omnipotent Creator be incapable of love, then man is the diviner being, because he is capable of a spiritual energy that transcends mere power. One spark of love is more godlike than mere strength, even though it be almighty. That is one service which Browning has rendered; in his poems he denies that physical science has explored the secret of existence; he tells us that material force is the lowest revelation that nature brings. He dethrones power, and makes love supreme. And when he beholds the supreme LOVE in a

tion of divine self-sacrifice, he declares that, before
d's transcendent act of mercy,

Even the Creation fades
Into a puny exercise of Power.

And so, regarding spirit as the essential reality, in
descriptions of nature we find that the outward
one is always a vital interpretation of the human
being. As the circle of the horizon is the limitation of
our own vision, as the sounds and colours of the world
are the creation of our senses,—so, according to Brown-
son, our emotions also have their part in the fashioning
of our environment, and the impression nature makes
on us depends upon our own spiritual condition. We
only *see* that which we *are* either in sense or soul.
This brings out this doctrine in a passage in part iv.
The Ring and the Book.

Man's mind—what is it but a convex glass
Wherein are gathered all the scattered points
Picked out of the immensity of sky,
To reunite them, be our heaven on earth,
Our known unknown, our God revealed to Man?

ture is not a mere background, there is a dynamic
interaction between the outward scene and the inward
character. This thought is employed in the *Epilogue to*
Idylls of the King to explain the method of divine revelation. He
tells us that in the Arctic Seas there is a gulf of water
which rages along a number of peaks of rock, and
seems to grow alive around them; each rock giving to
the waves a special form and appearance. On one spot
billows take the "hues of blackest hell;" while as

they advance to circle round another rock they glow
with

Such reds and blues

As only heaven could fitly interfuse.

That is a symbol of the various conceptions that men have held of God in different ages and nations. According to the stage of spiritual development was the kind of impression which the flowing tide of natural forces made upon the mind of man. And yet, this diversity of operation, when we trace its providential course, confirms our deepest faith in an eternal God, who employs the phenomena of nature for the discipline of his children. Instead of the differences of belief leading us to doubt the objective validity of our spiritual consciousness, they quicken our conviction of a Divine Vision shining through the veil of outward events, and a Divine purpose controlling the plastic dance of circumstance :—

That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,
Or decomposes but to recompose,
Become my universe that feels and knows!

The action of our spiritual nature, as well as the exercise of our senses, supplies the data of cognition, contributing to the constitution of an intelligible world. Around each mind facts of external and internal experience group themselves in conformity to its own conditions. When we ask what a thing is, we are really asking how it appears to some conscious mind; and in proportion to the number of minds concerning which the question is asked, the nearer do we approach that complete reality which is the object of omniscience to

the Absolute Mind that we call God. This profound truth is admirably expressed in Miss Martineau's *Deerbrook*. Hester says to her sister Margaret:—

“No tree waves to my eye as it did ten years ago, and the music of running water is richer to my ear as every summer comes round.”

“Yes;” (says Margaret) “I almost wonder sometimes whether all things are not made at the moment by the mind that sees them, so wonderfully do they change with one's mood, and according to the store of thoughts they lay open in one's mind. If I lived in a desert island (supposing one's intellect could go on to grow there), I should feel sure of this.”

“But not here” (replies Hester), “where it is quite clear that the village sot (if there be one), and Mr. Hope, and the children, and we ourselves all see the same objects in sunlight and moonlight, and acknowledge them to be the same, though we cannot measure feelings upon them.”

That passage expresses, very finely, the subjectivity of our knowledge, and the construction, through human intercourse, of what philosophers call the “social eject;” while it is through communion with God that we gain an absolute faith in the reality of the world as the object of an Eternal Mind.

So, Browning teaches, we create our own world, we fashion our own heaven or hell, nature reports to us the condition of our own being. There are many passages in which the outward scene and the inward emotion are fused into one vivid phenomenon. In *Pippa Passes*, the guilty man and woman, in the depth of the forest, feel as though the terrific thunderstorm was a messenger of wrath.

Buried in woods we lay, you recollect;
Swift ran the searching tempest overhead;

And ever and anon some bright white shaft
 Burnt through the pine-tree roof, here burnt and there,
 As if God's messenger through the close wood screen
 Plunged and replunged his weapon at a venture,
 Feeling for guilty me and thee: then broke
 The thunder like a whole sea overhead.

And Browning would have affirmed that the feeling of wrath in the lightning was as valid an experience as the sensation of its colour and flash; the one was created by the moral faculty, the other by the physical faculty; and, as far as reality is concerned, the revelation of nature in heart and conscience is as actual as that to eye and ear.

In *Paracelsus*, he gives us a profound reason for this sympathy between Nature and Man. Man is the final end of cosmic evolution; all the physical forces were feeling after conscious mind as the goal of their efforts. Nature *meant* Man in every stage of her ascent, and now he transfigures material phenomena with spiritual significance.

Man appears at last. So far the seal
 Is put on life; one stage of being complete,
 One scheme wound up; and from the grand result
 A supplementary reflux of light
 Illustrates all the inferior grades, explains
 Each back step in the circle. Not alone
 For their possessor dawns these qualities,
 But the new glory mixes with the heaven
 And earth; man once descried, imprints for ever
 His presence in all lifeless things: the winds
 Are henceforth voices, wailing or in a shout,
 A querulous mutter or a quick gay laugh;
 Never a senseless gust, now man is born!

I lay great stress on Browning's doctrine of nature.

as the symbol of spirit, as the hieroglyph of the inner life of man. In *Saul* we have a superb illustration of this. Young David has been to the King to deliver him from the evil spirit by the ministry of song and music. After leaving Saul's tent, where he has had an overpowering vision of eternal Love in the depths of Godhead, David is walking home, and the whole world becomes glorified with Spiritual Presences. All creatures are struck with wonder at the Divine Mystery:—

I know not too well how I found my way home in the night.
There were witnesses, cohorts, about me, to left and to right,
Angels, powers, the unuttered, unseen, the alive, the aware.—
I repressed, I got through them as hardly, as strugglingly there,
As a runner beset by the populace famished for news—
Life or death. The whole earth was awakened, hell loosed with
her crews;

And the stars of night beat with emotion, and tingled and shot
Out in fire the strong pain of pent knowledge: but I fainted not,
For the Hand still impelled me at once and supported, suppressed
All the tumult, and quenched it with quiet, and holy behest,
Till the rapture was shut in itself, and the earth sank to rest.
Anon at the dawn, all that trouble had withered from earth—
Not so much, but I saw it die out in the day's tender birth;
In the gathered intensity brought to the grey of the hills;
In the shuddering forest's held breath; in the sudden wind-
thrills;

In the startled wild beasts that bore off, each with eye sidling
still,
Though averted with wonder and dread; in the birds stiff and
chill

That rose heavily as I approached them, made stupid with awe:
E'en the serpent that slid away silent—he felt the new law.
The same stared in the white humid faces upturned by the
flowers;

The same worked in the heart of the cedar and moved the vine-
bowers:

And the little brooks witnessing murmured, persistent and low,
With their obstinate, all but hushed voices—"E'en so, it is so!"

All nature is waiting to say *Amen*! to the loftiest
aspiration of Man and the supreme revelation of God.

3.—THE JUDGMENT OF CHARACTER.

Even in his interpretation of nature, Browning takes the soul, with its spiritual conditions, as the key to outward phenomena. We may specially call him the poet of man; and, still more accurately, the poet of character. Other poets have been interested in character, but not in exactly the same way. Shakspeare is interested in character as it reveals itself in action, and as action influences other characters, modifies conditions, and evolves the complexities of a plot. Speaking generally, Shakspeare uses character to develop action; Browning uses action to unfold character. Often, he eliminates every element of the narrative except that which is absolutely necessary to the discovery of the secrets of some soul; no side-lights shall distract your attention or deflect your interest; every ray shall be gathered into one intense focus of blazing light, until you see the soul naked and open as though before the judgment seat of God.

I know of no more striking example of this than the tragedy, compressed into one scene, called *In a Balcony*. The poet is profoundly interested in A CRISIS ~~which has~~ come in the relations that three persons sustain to one another, and he will fix the whole of your attention upon the way in which each of them reveals character under the stress of a supreme moment as it executes a

final judgment on their lives. He cannot waste his time telling you the story ; you may guess it for yourself. From all the world he shuts in these three souls, and you shall see the Queen, Norbert and Constance working out their destinies on this balcony. At the beginning there are sounds of music and dancing in the adjoining palace ; but here is a tragedy being achieved that makes that world of gaiety seem like an empty dream. At the end you listen to the tramp of soldiers coming to arrest the lovers ; but here the two souls have found eternity in one moment of unutterable joy, and all that can come to them from the outside is but a passing trifle of the world of time ; even the doom of death will only consummate their love. In the moment of deepening fate, Norbert cries :—

Oh, some death

Will run its sudden finger round this spark
And sever us from the rest.

Many of these poems represent crises of experience, when the whole of the previous life must be precipitated into one final choice ; and in every case we find that the decision is the result, not of an isolated act of will, but of the whole past life,—the life through which a man has been forming his character and creating his destiny. Victor Hugo says, “Our acts make or mar us ; we are the children of our deeds.” In every thought, word and action of his commonplace daily life, the man has unconsciously been choosing the decision he must make in the hour of impending crisis. That is one secret of *Sordello*. Sordello has never been able to bring his mind and will into fruitful relation to the actual world ; and yet, through his alternating moods of brood-

ing thought, creative genius and human sympathy, the young Italian poet has yet been seeking the Highest; though often perplexed as to the right path, he has never been faithless to any ideal clearly revealed through the mists of doubt. So, when the great hour of temptation comes, when the Emperor's badge is thrown over his neck, when he is called to use his splendid gifts to serve a political party, his brave soul conquers in its agony, he stamps his foot upon the badge of earthly pride, and when his father and his lover enter, they find him dying,—the world renounced and eternity won.

In another form, we are taught the same truth in that strangely weird poem, *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*. It is a fatal mistake to translate this poem as though it were a kind of Pilgrim's Progress; it only seems obscure to those readers who will insist on finding in it allegorical meanings which Browning never intended. In regard to such a poem, when any one objects to its obscurity, we can only say, "he that hath ears to hear, let him hear." It is a mood of the soul expressed in imaginative form; and if you have never experienced such a mood the whole thing is quite inexplicable. We can scarcely *tell* what it means, but we *feel* its meaning; it is a transcript of a dominant mood, and it fulfils its end if it succeeds in reproducing in the reader a certain state of mind. Here we have a soul at the most critical stage of moral experience. The hero once set out with a brave and exultant company to take some stronghold called the Dark Tower. They thought in a few days to accomplish their purpose, and return triumphant. But years have passed, terrible dangers have been endured, one by one his companions have perished, he alone is

left, and yet the Dark Tower is not even reached. A kind of moral twilight is darkening upon him. Is the life of devotion to some high purpose a mistake? Would it have been better to have remained comfortably at home, and lived out an easy uneventful existence like other men? The everlasting sanctions seem like wandering meteors; truth and falsehood, right and wrong seem to have their distinctions blurred in a weltering chaos of hopeless misery. Is there a Dark Tower anywhere at all?—if so, will the discovery be worth a whole lifetime spent upon the search? At last, in a moment, the Tower appears; and then all the heroism of the despairing soul flashes up into one resolution, that, come life come death, come success come failure, the deed shall be attempted. The poem ends there, for it matters not whether he was victorious or defeated, the only thing we need to know is that the soul was saved from moral despair and spiritual ruin.

Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
And blew "*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came.*"

There are two passages which have helped me to understand the mood of mind transcribed in *Childe Roland*. The first is from Ruskin's *Mornings in Florence*; he is describing a picture of Fortitude by Sandro Botticello:—

What is chiefly notable in her is—that you would not, if you had to guess who she was, take her for Fortitude at all. Everybody else's Fortitudes announce themselves clearly and proudly. They have tower-like shields, and lion-like helmets—and stand firm astride on their legs,—and are confidently ready for all comers. Yes;—that is your common Fortitude. Very grand, though common. But not the highest, by any means.

Ready for all comers, and a match for them,—thinks the universal Fortitude;—no thanks to her for standing so steady then! But Botticelli's Fortitude is no match, it may be, for any that are coming. Worn, somewhat; and not a little weary, instead of standing ready for all comers, she is sitting,—apparently in reverie, her fingers playing restlessly and idly,—nay, I think—even nervously, about the hilt of her sword. For her battle is not begun to-day; nor did it begin yesterday. Many a morn and eve have passed since it began—and now—is this to be the ending day of it? And if this—by what manner of end? That is what Sandro's Fortitude is thinking, and the playing fingers about the sword-hilt would fain let it fall, if it might be: and yet, how swiftly and gladly will they close on it, when the far-off trumpet sounds, which she will hear through all her reverie. The other passage is from Myers's *Modern Essays* :—

It is hard to lose the dream of a life; and when that dream has drawn all its lustre from virtue, when joy has been conceived only in the loving service of the noblest being, the highest ideal we know, then if a man sees his ideal crushed before his eyes, and feels that heaven itself has turned against him, and that because he has disdained base things he has lost all—then shall it be known whether his virtue is a derivative and conquerable thing, or has in it an inbred energy that is incapable of despair. If he can raise his head to fight anew, he will find all fighting easy now. The worst has come to the worst: henceforth can no man trouble him; he bears in his spirit the tide-mark of its highest woe.

The virtue of Browning's hero is an inbred energy that is incapable of despair.

4.—THE APOCALYPSE OF MAN.

Browning's poems constitute a world of exhaustless interest; and yet with all their variety, we may describe them as an unfolding of the book of human life. The real life of man behind the transient shows,—that is

what they reveal. Popes and kings, saints and criminals, learned scholars and ignorant beggars,—all are dealt with in the same godlike fashion ; they are judged, not by the outward appearance, but by the inward condition of the heart. The great fact which obliterates the outward differences of these men and women is that they are *human*, and the poet's only interest in their outward condition relates to its influence upon the development of their souls. How he knows each one, how omniscient his insight, how swift his judgment,—swift as the sharp axe of his own hero Ivan, when by one blow it struck off the head of the mother who had sacrificed her children to save herself ! He has a miraculous power of putting himself in the place of the most diverse people. Of this power that terrible poem *The Ring and the Book* is a supreme instance. He tells us how he picked up the old worn-out pamphlet containing the story at a second-hand bookstall ; and the horrible details of the Roman Law-case set his mind working and his imagination glowing with creative power. What cared he for the mere facts of the tragedy and the technicalities of the Court of Justice ? These crude details of the Book should be fused with his own vital genius ; and, as the result, there should be produced a pure gold Ring of poetic art. Behind the dry, tedious pleadings of the lawyers for prosecution and defence there rose before him the various characters in the integrity of unique individualities ; Guido, Pompilia, Caponsacchi, the Pope ; and instantly the tangled web of greed and passion, love and hatred, lust and purity, doubt and faith, became resolved into an actual tragedy, in which are opened up to us the heavens and hells which human nature creates

for itself by inevitable spiritual laws. As you read, you almost tremble to sound the awful diapason of humanity, from deep dyed guilt to immaculate purity, from a wretch like Guido to a white-souled saint like Pompilia. We seem to hear the voice of the Apocalyptic Angel proclaiming, "And the Books were opened." This is an opening of the Books of Life, wherein the poet seems to trace every secret wish and motive, every shade of sophistry and self-deception in the men and women of whom his pages tell. One by one he takes the places of the different actors and spectators. You are made to view the tragedy from every point of view; even the wretched Guido shall be allowed to say everything he can to explain his crimes; while Pompilia shall make us see how a pure soul can retain its sainthood in scenes of hateful vice and strong temptation. The actors tell the story from their various points of view, until it grows into a Solid Reality; it ceases to be merely an historical event or legal complication; it becomes an organic tissue of human thought and feeling, vengeance and mercy, hope and fear, hatred and love. Since reading this poem, every time I look at the volumes, it seems as though they were living things,—remembering, as I do, the human passions which saturate the pages.

In the largest sense of the word, Browning is a strenuous humanist. Everything which men have felt, and thought, and done, and suffered is of interest to him. "For the essence of humanism," it has been well said, "is the belief that nothing which has ever interested living men and women can wholly lose its vitality—no language they have spoken, nor oracle by which they have hushed their voices, no dream which has once been

entertained by actual human minds, nothing about which they have ever been passionate or expended time and zeal."

To use our poet's own words, love has made him wise.

To trace love's faint beginnings in mankind,
To know, e'en hate is but a mask of love's,
To see a good in evil, and a hope
In ill-success; to sympathise, be proud
Of their half-reasons, faint aspirings, dim
Struggles for truth, their poorest fallacies,
Their prejudice and fears and cares and doubts.

This intense imaginative sympathy with every form of experience explains why Browning deals with so many hateful deeds, horrible events, and doubtful characters. The sin and weakness are human, and therefore must be explored. And these things he deals with, not as an immoral realist or a flippant cynic, but as a merciful physician. The physician must understand the processes of disease as well as the laws of health; and even the most revolting revelations of sin in these pages have a healing and restoring influence upon the reader's mind and heart. I cannot but think that many of us have been shamed out of our baser selves by the light which Browning pours upon unsuspected evils in dark corners of the soul. Very frequently he seems fascinated by a type of character shadowed by its own sophistries. He follows, with amazing skill, all the sinuosities of self-deception, and shows us how the moral sense can be paralyzed by pleas which the understanding pronounces unanswerable. When once the light which is in us is darkened by a fog of sophistries, then how great is that

darkness in which the soul goes drifting it knows not whither! Then the pole-star in heaven is obscured, and the compass on earth is deflected. That, Browning thinks, is one of the most fatal conditions;—worse than any sin of sense and passion is the self-delusion which blurs the moral distinctions, drugs the conscience, and seems to make remorse and repentance impossible to the man who has yielded himself up to believe a lie! He sometimes seems fascinated by the horrible and grotesque, thinking, with Goethe, that Nature reveals her secrets in monsters. These *terrae incognitae*, these obscure territories in the realm of character he has explored with unrelenting severity; and many a time must the discovery of secret sin have roused his readers to cast out the evil thing that was unconsciously working a moral catastrophe.

In all this, we notice how Browning makes everything subservient to the individual man. Personality with its abysmal deeps,—that, he holds, is the supreme fact, the surpassing miracle, the one infinite element in a finite world of space and time. And, in the present day, when men are trying to manufacture millenniums apart from a change in the personal being, the teaching of Browning as to the final test of personal integrity of soul is what the world needs most of all to ponder and lay to heart. A thousand times better to endure the sufferings of the world for centuries to come, than attempt to abolish them by the creation of a mechanical system, which would have the effect of making the living soul a mere working factor in a huge machine constructed to grind out a utilitarian happiness. Man can do without happiness, but he cannot do without

moral freedom, spiritual greatness, and personal responsibility. Before any questions as to a man's happiness and misery, success and failure,—before even any question as to whether his actions conform to any external ethical code, there is the prior question: how much is there of him? has he any soul? is there in him any positive force and effective will-power? Ay! and our poet hints that, even before the question of immortality, he is tempted to ask: is there anything behind the shows of time that can claim an eternal destiny? In *A Toccata of Galuppi's* he says:—

The soul doubtless is immortal—*where a soul can be discerned.*

To use the splendid irony of St. Paul, Browning has no patience with the man who thinks himself to be *something*, when he is NOTHING. All outward words and deeds are interesting, only when they express a valid personality. A man should not only be good, he should be good for something. He thinks there is more hope of a strong sinner than of a flabby saint; you can make nothing of flabbiness, any more than you can build a house of sand or grow a forest from the chaff which the wind driveth away. The force of character which makes a great sinner may fashion a great saint. The passionate sin of a strenuous soul may be the wrongly directed energy that can yet be gathered up for some higher purpose. The very aberrations caused by the presence of a deflecting object are abundant testimony that the needle is so polarised as to be able to turn to the North. It is Saul the zealous persecutor, sweeping through the land in a whirlwind of eager wrath, who becomes Paul the Apostle of mankind. It is this that so

greatly puzzles some people when they read these poems. Before Browning asks whether a man is ethically good or bad, he wants to know whether he is anything. He cannot endure lethargy and indifference and torpid conventionalism. You might take as the text of some of his poems, those words of divine severity: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would that thou wert cold or hot. So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth."* The chivalry of God does not consist of those who have kept their garments unspotted by cowardly avoidance of the battle and lazy renunciation of the world; it is formed of

The soldier-saints, who, row on row,
Burn upward to his point of bliss.

And the one sin that seems most effectually to frustrate the end of life

Is, the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin.†

A man must be of a positive quality before anything can be made of him. Our poet is of the same mind as Dante in his verdict of those neutrals, who, in the battle on the plains of heaven, would join neither with God nor Satan, but stood aloof, waiting to see which side won,—ready to shout their paean with the victorious army. But when the battle was over, they were turned out of heaven as traitors, and hell would not receive such worthless sneaks; and so they had to remain in a limbo of their own, the off-scouring of the universe, enduring alike the contempt of angels and devils.‡

* *Revelation* iii. 15. † *The Statue and the Bust*. ‡ *Inferno*, Canto III.

Neutrals—those are the only beings for whom Browning feels unutterable contempt.

“Good is understood,” says Maurice, “not only as the opposite of evil, but also as the deliverance from it.”

And our poet thinks that virtue must be of a positive quality, it must possess a conquering energy, fashioning the being after the power of an endless life. The negative and passive goodness which Browning condemns is vividly expressed in those words of Milton, descriptive of a passing mood in Satan :—

That space the Evil One abstracted stood
From his own evil, and for the time remained
*Stupidly good.**

5.—THE LAW OF LIFE.

With this emphasis on a strenuous personality, his great rule of conduct is: “follow your highest impulse;” whether your stake in the game be a wooden button or a gold coin, it matters not; let us see how earnestly you will play your part; whatever purpose you follow, when once you have chosen it, put all your reserved strength into its achievement; risk everything to accomplish your purpose; never mind whether you succeed or fail, the very effort that never slacks its courage is success; you have proved your soul, you have tested your strength, and that is enough. To many, that sounds like dangerous advice; instead of exaltation of impulse, they would rather approve the severe morality of Wordsworth’s Ode to Duty as the

* *Paradise Lost*, IX. 463.

"stern Daughter of the Voice of God." But I think it might be shown that there is not so much a difference of doctrine between these two great poets as a difference of point of view. From one point of view duty does seem a higher word than impulse; but, on many occasions Browning thinks that what goes by the name of duty is merely a social conventionality with no divine authority to control the living energies of a man's inner life. The inanities of custom are often mistaken for the sacraments of duty. The mighty reserves of a divine soul may be wasted on the shallow levels of a monotonous conformity; while faithful tenacity to the soul's own highest impulse gives a binding strength to the character and a stately beauty to the manhood. There must often be "a noble antinomianism," as a strong nature breaks through the obstructions of artificial rules to realise an absolute loyalty to a supreme ideal.* The rejection of current codes must never, indeed, be prompted by frivolity or license; the traditional precept must only be denied under the diviner stress of pure aspiration and holy passion; "the only right of rebellion is the right to seek a higher law." This is excellently illustrated in the apocryphal story which tells us that Christ once saw a man working on the Sabbath, and said: "If thou understandest what thou art doing, blessed art thou; but if thou understandest it not thou art accursed." These words have been thus paraphrased:—"If thou hast so large an idea of a man's life as to look on the Sabbath-day as his servant, and not his master, and thou

* *The Flight of the Duchess* may be studied as illustrating these remarks.

art working in that broad sphere of intelligence, blessed art thou, because thou art emancipated; but if thou believest the Sabbath-day to be a divine law to which thou owest obedience, and in defiance of that art working on it, accursed art thou." There do come seasons of tremendous stress in the lives of everyone of us, when no outward law can adequately solve the moral problem which confronts us; not the wisest code of ethics can possibly provide for all the exigencies of our complex existence in such a world as this; and perhaps never more clearly do we recognise the divine authority of conscience than in the solemn moment when we fall back upon the primary impulses of our own hearts, and turning aside from all prudential calculations, make our appeal to the Supreme Rectitude, saying: "Lord, what wilt THOU have me to do?" Browning, then, is right in his contention that no formal maxims can cover all the complexities of moral conduct. Before he condemns a violation of social law, he inquires into the spirit which prompted the rebellion, and he often finds that the seeming lawlessness is really fidelity to a loftier claim, that the apparent immorality is a sacred impulse which affirms diviner ethics than those embodied in the social code. For, we must notice, he does not say, "follow impulse," he says, "obey your HIGHEST impulse," for though it be not absolutely the best, yet the highest he can conceive is for every man his relative best, the immediate revelation of what he must resolutely strive after. That, as far as I can see, is what he means,—duty is very often the voice of man, and of man in his prudential and utilitarian moods; while the noblest conviction of the heart is most frequently the voice of

God ; and in all cases where these come into conflict we must obey God rather than man.

These considerations help us to the meaning of the much misunderstood poem *The Statue and the Bust*. Browning no more commends licentiousness in this poem than Christ commends dishonesty in the parable of the Unjust Steward. Here we are given a striking instance of the imbecile ineffectiveness which makes some lives so sterile. There is a wretched weakness of character which forbids any emotion, either good or bad, to become an overmastering impulse. Some men and women drift, creatures of vapid whims and wishes, they are swung this way and that way with every eddy of time and circumstance. The Knight and the Lady, in *The Statue and the Bust*, have not the courage to take their fate either for good or evil into their own hands. They are lukewarm, and the stern poet would rather that they were either cold or hot. In wretched, drivelling imbecility they hesitate ; she gazes longingly at him from the window, he sends furtive glances up to her from the street. If they felt it a crime to love each other, why did they not separate for ever, and break the last link which held them to their sin ? Their very neutrality was in itself a fatal decision that brought a more miserable catastrophe for all concerned than any which a bold action could have precipitated. To linger on in the indulgence of evil desire was the disintegration of all the finer elements of character ; and, then, to immortalise their imbecility by the Bust in the window and the Statue in the street was for ever to consign themselves to the limbo of frustrate ghosts.

In his admiration for strenuous personality, Thomas Carlyle was led to his doctrine of Hero-worship and his glorification of force, which some have so wrongly interpreted by the affirmation that might is right. Carlyle has been much misunderstood on that matter, in consequence of a certain exaggerated and dangerous emphasis, such as Browning, I think, has never employed in teaching the same truth. However we may regard isolated passages in these poems, yet we can all see how excellent is the counsel he intends to give us,—to set about doing the best work we can find, without utilitarian calculation as to profit and loss,—to seek for that best work, not in the demands of the outward world, but in the deepest impulses of our own souls. The great matter is, not what our work gets for us, but what it makes of us. In this way, he frequently shows the real triumph of lives which outwardly appear to be failures. Sordello, dying in the wrestle of conflicting motives, with the Emperor's badge under his feet, reaches a sublime victory, compared with which a long life of diplomatic success and imperial splendour would have been but a paltry thing. The very striving is great, apart from any outward end you gain.

They fail, and they alone, who have not striven.

And this struggle, through all obstructions, to realise our best self is prophetic of that perfect state, where we shall

Reach the ultimate, angels' law;
There, where law, life, joy, impulse are one thing.

6.—THE MYSTERY OF PROVIDENCE.

Browning, in his dedication of *Sordello*, says, "The historical decoration was purposely of no more importance than a background requires; and my stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul: little else is worth study." And he teaches us that, from the point of view of spiritual development, many problems of life appear capable of solution. What John Stuart Mill calls the "cruelties of nature" are seen to be the discipline which has for its end the perfecting of man. To provide a sphere where man may develop his soul, wage his moral warfare, and lay hold of eternal life, this material world of inexorable law was created. This majestic realm of power exists for the education of character; here is laid the strong foundation, on which man may plant his feet as the first stage in an everlasting progress. In *Easter Day* we have this finely expressed:—

What was the world, the starry state
Of the broad skies, what all displays
Of power and beauty intermixed,
Which now thy soul is chained betwixt,—
What else but needful furniture
For life's first stage?

That is the answer to many perplexing questions,—the need of providential discipline for the development of the soul. Why is life so difficult? That man may overcome difficulties, and show himself a conqueror. Why are there so many possibilities of evil in the world? That man may *choose* the good; for without the alternative of evil there could be no voluntary act of

virtue,—and therefore no virtue at all. Why is there not a full and universal revelation of eternal destiny? That man may exercise his free-will, which would be paralysed by the blinding light of the eternal blazon. Two passages may be quoted which gather up these teachings. In regard to the meaning of evil and the function of temptation he says:—

Whence comes temptation, but for man to meet
And master, and make crouch beneath his feet;
And so be pedestalled in triumph?

In regard to the obscurity which often mingles doubt with our faith he says:—

God, whose pleasure brought
Man into being, stands away
As it were, a handbreadth off, to give
Room for the newly made to live,
And look at Him from a place apart,
And use his gifts of brain and heart.

That is,—the Divine Will is not forced upon us from without; room is left for voluntary action, moral growth, self-development.

We are not created to be machines of power and slaves of fear; we are free men, with the awful gift of achieving our own destinies. The veil which shrouds the Eternal Mystery is tightly drawn; but from behind that veil the Heavenly Judge watches how men unfold their lives, how, in every event and change, they make the discovery of their characters.

God made us for a work,
Watches our working, judges its effect,
But does not interfere.

In all this, I think Browning suggests a more sufficient definition of religion than that given by Matthew Arnold who describes it as transfigured morality. Browning teaches us that, apart from the effects of an action in this world, there is the religious question of what we have made of ourselves in the light of the Ideal; and if we have been disloyal to that Ideal, no matter what the verdict of the world, we have failed in our life work. He says:—

There is no duty patent in the world
Like trying to be good and true oneself,
Leaving the shows of things to the Lord of show
And Prince o' the Power of the Air.

That is the one end of all the discipline of life:—

Namely, that just the creature I was bound
To be, I should become, nor thwart at all
God's purpose in creation. I conceive
No other duty possible to man,—
Highest mind, lowest mind,—no other law
By which to judge life failure or success,
What folks call being saved or cast away.

That is the one test by which life must be tried,—the result of the earthly life upon the soul:—

No matter what the object of a life,
Small work or large,— the making thrive a shop,
Or seeing that an empire take no harm,—
There are known fruits to judge obedience by.

+ Man's relation to his fellows constitutes his morality, his consciousness of personal relation to the living God opens up to him the vistas of religious faith.

And yet, when you reach his largest doctrine, you find his moral and religious teachings blend into one

glorious affirmation of the supremacy of Love. When a perfect love becomes the highest impulse, then the vocation of life is achieved, religion and morality combine into one unbroken harmony. The Supreme Being is revealed under three manifestations:—POWER, KNOWLEDGE, LOVE; but until you reach the Love, you cannot truly apprehend the Knowledge and the Power. Love is the immediate presence of the divine in the human. You can never attain to omniscience and omnipotence; but, in his own bold way, Browning says:—

A man may o'ertake
God's own speed, in the one way of Love.

He affirms that :—

Love leads the soul to the highest perfection.

You may have all knowledge and all power, but without Love you are nothing.

Were Knowledge all thy faculty—then God
Must be ignored. Love gains Him by first leap.

Some one may be inclined to object to all this, and say :—This teaching is very beautiful and poetic ; but it is hard to believe that in such a world as this Love is the deepest, strongest force ; it often looks as though strength and cleverness and cunning ruled despotically the course of history. And so, to show us how Love may be the secret of many of the crises that make history, Browning wrote one of his most perfect poems, called *Pippa Passes*.

A little ignorant, bare-footed factory girl of Asolo goes out for her new year's holiday, her heart full of joy

in God, and overflowing with love to all God's creatures. And, as she passes on her way, singing her tender songs, she unconsciously enacts a final judgment on some of the men and women who listen to her childish voice. Pippa passes,—the murderer hears her song, instantly he flings his guilty paramour from his side and renounces his ill-gotten gains. Pippa passes with her simple human song,—and the despairing man at once resolves to devote his life to a service of love. Pippa passes with her rousing ballad,—and the patriot is inspired to risk all for his country's good. Pippa passes with her hymn of holy childhood,—and the crafty Cardinal casts out the tempter to whom he has been listening all too long. Then Pippa passes to her garret and her bed, unconscious of the influence of her words,—words through which heaven has pronounced judgment and appointed destiny. By her pure love that maiden reposes on the breast of God; and, all unknown to herself, she acts as His vicegerent in the world. That unsophisticated love drinks at the very fountain of the divine, and has a secret wisdom which baffles the subtlety of sin and the trickery of clever worldliness. From that exquisite poem we strengthen our faith in the omnipotence of Love,—the conquering power of Goodness even when it seems most weak.

7.—THE HOPE OF IMMORTALITY.

In closing these introductory remarks, I notice that Browning is the poet of the immortal hope. Indeed, to him immortality is more than a hope, it is a certainty bound up with man's progressive nature, and even

prophesied by his imperfection and failures. If a man's life could be rounded into a perfect circle within the limits of time, then no thought of another world would disturb the placid consciousness of completeness here. But since the greatest men are those whose endeavours and deeds always seem to them incomplete, our human life appears not so much a circle as an endless SPIRAL, sweeping into wider, loftier realms, beyond the clouds of time into the azure of eternity. He contends that there is an infinite element in human nature, that man is not a mere creature of time and space, that he is able to look from the gift

To the Giver,
And from the cistern to the river,
And from the finite to infinity,
And from man's dust to God's divinity.

Many remarkable passages might be quoted in which the spiritual significance of man's progressive nature is enforced. It is impossible to conceive of a full step to the spirit's flight; every limit melts at last into a wider horizon. In *Luria*, Domizia cries:—

How inexhaustible the spirit grows!
One object, she seemed erewhile born to reach
With her whole energies and die content,—
So like a wall at the world's edge it stood,
With naught beyond to live for,—is that reached?—
Already are new undreamed of energies
Outgrowing under, and extending farther
To a new object ;—*there's another world !*

The very failures of this life become transfigured into prophecies of immortal victory. From all the contradictions and losses and sufferings of earth there is being

distilled an elixir of life, whose brimming cup shall not be dashed even by the hand of death.

Only grant a second life, I acquiesce
 In this present life a failure, count misfortune's worst assaults
 Triumph, not defeat; assured that loss so much the more exalts
 Gain about to be. For at what moment did I so advance
 Near to knowledge, as when frustrate of escape from ignorance?
 Did not beauty prove most precious when its opposite obtained
 Rule, and truth seemed more than ever potent because falsehood
 reigned?
 While for love—oh how but losing love, does whoso loves succeed
 By the death-pang to the birth-throe—learning what is love
 indeed?
 Only grant my soul may carry high through death her cup
 unspilled,
 Brimming though it be with knowledge, life's loss drop by drop
 distilled,
 I shall boast it mine—the balsam, bless each kindly wretch that
 wrung
 From life's tree its inmost virtue, tapped the root whence
 pleasure sprung,
 Barked the bole, and broke the bough, and bruised the berry,
 left all grace
 Ashes in death's stern alembic, loosed elixir in its place!

Death is the breaking up of the narrow prison of
 time, that the spirit may be free :—

And stung by straitness of our life made strait
 On purpose to make sweet the life at large,
 Freed by the throbbing impulse we call death,
 We burst there, as the worm into the fly,
 Who, while a worm still, wants his wings.

After a life of failure, when Paracelsus feels the
 shadows of death deepening upon him he bursts into that
 rapture of faith :—

If I stoop
Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud,
It is but for a time ; I press God's lamp
Close to my breast ; its splendour, soon or late,
Will pierce the gloom : I shall emerge one day.

To Browning the soul is a supersensuous reality, not evolved out of matter, but only for a time environed by physical conditions to secure identity, discipline, and a starting point for growth. When the body has done its work, the soul awakes :—

As mid the dark, a gleam
Of yet another morning breaks,
And, like the hand which ends a dream,
Death, with the might of his sunbeam,
Touches the flesh, and the soul awakes,
Then !

Then, when at that touch of death the soul wakes from the dream of life, it will gather up its powers for another cycle in the endless progress of its being. We shall find all this enforced with great power in his love poems, especially in those which deal with separation, disappointment and death. The Love which seems to fail has yet done its work, it has quickened new visions and ampler activities ; and when the soul passes from earth such love shall be made perfect.

In that touching poem, *Evelyn Hope*, the lover looks into the dead face of the maiden, and in his grief rallies himself by the assurance that such a love as his must, by its very intensity, find a supreme beatitude. As he looks, he says :—

For God above
 Is great to grant as mighty to make,
 And creates the love to reward the love ;
 I claim you still for my own love's sake !
 Delayed it may be for more lives yet,
 Through worlds I shall traverse, not a few :
 Much is to learn and much to forget
 Ere the time be come for taking you.

* * * * *

So hush,—I will give you this leaf to keep :
 See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand !
 There, that is our secret : go to sleep !
 You will wake, and remember, and understand.

That leaf, pressed into the cold hand, is a token of the meeting which *must* come, though ages intervene, and new worlds are traversed before the appointed hour arrives.

That is the grandeur of Browning ; the shadows only show him where the light is found. Suffering and imperfection only testify to the coming joy and triumph. Earthly incompleteness only prophesies the vaster destiny for which the soul is made. That is our chief glory,—we can conceive a BEST beyond our utmost attainment, a radiant ideal beyond our highest reach, the quest of which brings out all the capabilities of our nature, and opens up to us an everlasting progress.

Love, wrong, and pain, what see I else around ?
 Yea, and the resurrection and uprising
 To the right hand of the throne !

Remembering these things, it was with a chastened grief that we heard that our great teacher had passed away. Instantly we recalled those brave words in

which he looks death in the face, finding nothing to fear and everything to hope ; and above all, is certain that he is about to clasp again that perfect wife who was the soul of his soul. In *Prospice* some one asks him if he does not fear death, if he would not prefer to pass away unconsciously without having to face its terrors. He cries :—

Fear death ? to feel the fog in my throat,
The mist in my face,
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote
I am nearing the place,
The power of the night, the press of the storm,
The post of the foe ;
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,
Yet the strong man must go ;
For the journey is done and the summit attained,
And the barriers fall,
Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,
The reward of it all.
I was ever a fighter, so one fight more,
The best and the last !
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore
And bade me creep past.
No ! let me share the whole of it, fare like my peers
The heroes of old,
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
Of pain, darkness, and cold.
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
The black minute's at end,
And the element's rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul ! I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest.

CHAPTER III.

POEMS ON RELIGION.

One night Gabriel from his seat in Paradise heard the voice of God sweetly responding to a human heart. The angel said, "Surely this must be an eminent servant of the Most Holy, whose spirit is dead to lust and lives on high." The angel hastened over land and sea to find this man, but could not find him in the earth or heavens. At last he exclaimed, "O Lord! show me the way to this object of thy love." God answered, "Turn thy steps to yon village, and in that pagoda thou shalt behold him." The angel sped to the pagoda, and therein found a solitary man kneeling before an idol. Returning, he cried, "O Master of the world! hast thou looked with love on a man who invokes an idol in a pagoda?" God saith, "I consider not the error of ignorance: this heart, amid its darkness, hath the highest place."—*From the Persian.*

"Thou hast written well of me," said the Vision to St. Thomas of Aquino, "what reward wilt thou accept?" "Non alium nisi te Domine—no reward but thine own self, O Lord!" was the saint's reply.

Christmas Eve.

The great lesson of *Christmas Eve* is that the essence of Christianity is a self-sacrificing and redeeming love. The gods of the ancient world were chiefly characterised by the love of power, the Christian Deity displays the power

of love. Through all the different forms of faith into which Christianity is divided, men are groping their way to this sublime truth which must convert their natures and transfigure their lives.

I.

On Christmas Eve, 1849, the poet describes himself wandering on a common in a pitiless storm of wind and rain. He takes shelter in the porch of a little dissenting chapel, which stands between the common and the lowest quarter of a provincial town. It is nearly time for evening service, and he watches the members of the congregation push past him through the creaking door. Weary women, sickly men and miserable children come gathering from the filthy lanes of the town and from the hovels in the gravel-pits across the common. To these poor creatures the white-washed chapel seems the only way to heaven. Out of their squalor and toil and wretchedness they gather into what seems to them the house of God, where they get glimpses of some higher life, some divine comfort and immortal hope. The poet watches them; he sees the rude and almost angry glances they cast upon the intruder who blocks up the narrow door way to their Mount Zion. So, as the storm increases, he decides to leave the uncomfortable position and enter the chapel and join in the service. But he finds the thing intolerable. The preacher is a converted drunkard, coarse, uneducated and dogmatic. He was converted from a brutal life by the warnings and invitations of the Bible; and on the strength of that conversion he thinks he can expound all the hid

treasure of Holy Scripture. And yet the poet might, perhaps, have borne with even the immense stupidity of the sermon, if he could have seen a single face that seemed to question its doctrines. But the satisfaction and enjoyment of the congregation was even more irritating than the blatant dogmatism of the preacher. To the hearers the sermon contained the one truth, apart from which there was no salvation. As they heard about their own election and the world's condemnation, as they drank in every word as the dew of Hermon, the men snuffed with comfort, the women purred and twirled their thumbs in contentment, the whole congregation rocked in satisfaction on their seats, keeping measure to the rising periods of the discourse. At last, the poet tells us, he could bear it no longer :—

'Twas too provoking!

My gorge rose at the nonsense and stuff of it,
So, saying, like Eve when she plucked the apple,
I wanted a taste, and now there's enough of it,
I flung myself out of the little chapel.

II.

As he flung himself out upon the common, there was a lull in the storm ; the moon shone through rifts of the clouds, and the calmness and glory of nature was a refreshing contrast to the hot chapel, the noisy preacher and the dirty congregation. A mood of peace and thankfulness descended upon the poet's soul. He was grateful that his religion was so much superior to the vulgar creed of that narrow sect. In a beautiful meditation he tells us how, from childhood, Nature had been the temple where he had worshipped the power

and love of God. It is through love that man shares the divine life. If God were only powerful, then the meanest creature with one spark of love would be diviner than its Creator.

For the loving worm within its clod,
Were diviner than a loveless god
Amid his worlds, I will dare to say.

And since the All-powerful is the All-loving, there is not a need of human nature that God does not provide for ; and there must be, therefore, an immortal life to complete the broken lives of men on earth. Pondering these things, his mind is carried along a tide of joy. He thanks God for this lofty faith, this spiritual religion, this perfect trust. As he reflects how earth's shadows will at last dissolve before heaven's glories, he cries :—

And I shall behold Thee, face to face,
O God, and in Thy light retrace
How in all I loved here, still wast thou ;
Whom pressing to, then, as I fain would now,
I shall find as able to satiate
The love, Thy gift, as my spirit's wonder
Thou art able to quicken and sublimiate,
With this sky of Thine, that I now walk under,
And glory in Thee for, as I gaze
Thus, thus! Oh ! let men keep their ways
Of seeking Thee in a narrow shrine—
Be this my way! And this *is* mine.

With that thought, he lifts his eyes to the moonlit sky,—and lo ! a wondrous sign, which seems to be a revelation of God to his rapt soul. A glorious Lunar Rainbow is stretched across the heavens in awful beauty. It seems to his excited mind to be the herald of some sublime

manifestation of the unseen God. The veiled and hidden love, which he has revered all his life, is coming forth into visible form to crown and bless his faithful soul! That rainbow is the pathway along which shall travel some radiant Presence. He waits in awe, saying to himself :—

Oh! whose foot shall I see emerge,
Whose, from the straining topmost dark,
On to the keystone of the arc?

He feels that God and his own soul are coming into contact. Oh! that he could remain for ever here; in reverent boldness he cries :—

Appear!
Good were it to be ever here.
If thou wilt, let me build to Thee
Service tabernacles Three,
Where, forever in thy presence,
In ecstatic acquiescence,
Far alike from thriftless learning
And ignorance's undiscerning,
I may worship and remain!

Then the glory burst into unutterable splendour, it filled his brain, it blazed forth and seemed to stream in a winding path, like a trailing garment of light, along the ground before him; and as his eyes followed the mazy folds of serpentine glory, he looked up with sudden terror, and lo! Christ was there.

He was there,
He himself with his human air.
On the narrow pathway, just before,
I saw the back of Him, no more—
He had left the chapel, then, as I!

That majestic vision of the Christ moving before him with the shining vesture,—how it aroused new thoughts in the poet's mind ! He had been so impatient with the noise and vulgarity of the little chapel, and yet Christ was there in divine love and infinite pitifulness. He had been boasting that the God he worshipped in the temple of nature was so far removed above the narrow shrines of men,—and now the Universe can give no grander revelation than this vision of the Christ who will consecrate the humblest sanctuary with his presence.

I remembered, He did say
Doubtless, that, to this world's end,
Where two or three should meet and pray,
He would be in the midst, their friend :
Certainly He was with them there.

Then he felt ashamed of his spiritual pride. It seemed to him that Christ turned away his face because he had despised his friends, who, in their own way, were meeting together in his name. In an agony of desire, he reaches forward, and seizes the hem of Christ's shining garment, and he cries :—

But not so Lord ! It cannot be
That Thou, indeed, art leaving me—
Me that have despised Thy friends.

* * * * *

Folly and pride o'ercame my heart.

* * * * *

I thought it best that Thou, the Spirit,
Be worshipped in spirit and in truth,
And in beauty, as even we require it—
Not in the forms burlesque, uncouth,
I left but now, as scarcely fitted
For Thee : I knew not what I pitied,

But all I felt there, right or wrong,
What is it to Thee, who curest sinning ?
Am I not weak as Thou art strong ?
I have looked to Thee from the beginning,
Straight up to Thee through all the world
Which, like an idle scroll, lay furled
To nothingness on either side :
And since the time Thou wast descried,
Spite of the weak heart, so have I
Lived ever, and so fain would die,
Living and dying, Thee before !
But if Thou leavest me——

By this prayer of agony the heart of Christ is moved ; he looks at his disciple clasping his raiment's hem ; the whole Face turns upon the man who falls prone, stretched upon the ground, saturate with brightness.

III.

Then it seemed to him as though he was caught up into the folds of Christ's garment. He is swept away whither he knows not ; he only knows that the Master has not deserted him ; he is not only permitted to touch the raiment's hem, he is gathered up and made safe in the vesture's amplitude. And now there returns something of the old spiritual pride. After all, Christ himself acknowledges that his spiritual faith is the best way ; he is free from the foolish superstitions by which men seek to worship God ; while others are groping their way, he is gathered into the very folds of the vesture of Incarnate Love. While he thus congratulates himself, he little knows whither Christ is leading him. He thought he was soaring aloft into the empyrean of a

faith so spiritual and sublime that it needed no aid from outward form. And, instead of finding himself in heaven, he discovers that he has arrived at Papal Rome. He is standing before St. Peter's; Christ has entered; the poet remains outside, gazing on the marvellous spectacle within. The whole cathedral is alive with men and women, like a hive swarming with bees. It is Christmas Eve; this is the solemn service of the Mass; the silver bell tinkles, and the vast multitude falls in worship upon the marble floor; for at that moment it is believed that the mystery of Love is complete, and God becomes present in the bread and wine of the Divine Sacrifice.

And Christ is there,—even as he was in the white-washed chapel by the lonely common. Christ is there,—amidst the thousands who crowd the gorgeous cathedral, as he was with the two or three who listened to the stupid preacher. As he holds fast to the garment's hem, he begins to learn that through these clouds of superstition Christ sees the spark of love which is the secret of even the most perverted form of Christian worship. Men believe in the transubstantiation of bread and wine into Christ's flesh and blood, because it seems to bring God so near to them, because it makes the mystery of redemption palpable to their very senses. Faith in this stupendous miracle of the Mass grew out of a consuming hunger of the human heart for the love of God. Through the deepest night of ignorance and error the heart of man still tries to feel the heart of God, just

As a babe can find its mother's breast
As well in darkness as in light.

He looks on the prostrate multitude in a new spirit.
He sees the error; but above the scope of error, sees
the love. He cannot join in worship which to him
seems full of superstition; but he feels a wonderful
sympathy with the vast congregation, when he sees
LOVER shining on every forehead, written above the
earnest eyes of all.

I will be wise another time,
And not desire a wall between us,
When next I see a church-roof cover
So many species of one genus,
All with foreheads bearing LOVER
Written above the earnest eyes of them,
In noble daring, steadfast duty,
Or, lowered for sense's satisfaction,
To the mere outside of human creatures,
Mere perfect form and faultless features.

He says it is a solemn fact that these Italians, with so
many sources of satisfaction in literature, art, music,
song and architecture, should thus bind up their
passionate desires in one great act of faith and worship.

What? with all Rome here, whence to levy
Such contributions to their appetite,
With women and men in a gorgeous bevy,
They take, as it were, a padlock, clap it tight
On their southern eyes, restrained from feeding
On the glories of their ancient reading,
On the beauties of their modern singing,
On the wonders of the builder's bringing,
On the majesties of Art around them,—
And all these loves, late struggling incessant,
When faith has at last united and bound them,
They offer up to God for a present?

Why I will, on the whole, be rather proud of it,—
And, only taking the act in reference
To the other recipients who might have allowed of it,
I will rejoice that God had the preference.

IV.

The poet is impressed by the passionate credulous love of the prostrate multitude in St. Peter's. And yet he feels that he must have something to satisfy the intellect as well as the heart. He says :

I, a man who possesses both,
Will accept the provision, nothing loth.,
Will feast my love, then depart elsewhere,
That my intellect may find its share.

As the wish rises, he is again caught up in the folds of the vesture's amplitude ; again he follows the silent Christ, until he finds himself at the entrance to a college in Germany. Christ has entered, and the poet, holding the raiment's hem, follows him, resolved not to lose the chance of joining in fellowship with *any* that call themselves his friends. As he enters the lecture-room, he finds a crowd of students listening to a discourse by a worn, old professor, whose intellect seems to have consumed his frame. The thin studious man, with a consumptive cough that threatens to shake him to pieces,

Stood, surveying his auditory
With a wan pure look, well nigh celestial,—
Those blue eyes had survived so much !

It is Christmas Eve, the professor takes for his subject the origins of the Christian religion. He

reduces much in the gospel to mere mythology. He even questions whether Christ ever lived at all; certainly the "Christ" who is worshipped as a God is only a myth, created partly out of a misunderstanding of the Master's teaching, and partly out of the creative power of such feelings as loyalty, wonder and reverence. The most that can be said, from a rationalistic point of view, is that Christ was a man very good and very wise, whose superior goodness and wisdom afford some excuse for his disciples when they worship him as divine. The professor concludes that, if they are not sure about the historical Christ, they cannot do better than venerate such a splendid myth as that presented by Christianity. He also thinks they will do well to continue to call themselves "Christians;" and if they feel the need of some form towards which to direct their adoration, this gracious Figure of "the Christ" presents a nobler object for their reverence than any who went before him, or who have ever followed after him.

And Christ is there! as he was present in the white-washed chapel and the gorgeous cathedral, so the Saviour is in the rationalistic college listening patiently to this inquiry as to whether he ever lived at all; and, if he lived, how it is that his followers have counted him divine. As the poet watches, he wonders how Christ can endure this relentless criticism, which reduces the pearl of great price to dust and ashes. At last it dawns upon him that even here there is at least the ghost of love; at the roots of that dry, analytical brain there is a lurking drop of warm blood, which throbs with feeling at even the myth of divine suffering and sacrifice. Even where there is the ghost of love, Christ is present;

though they only reverence him as a beautiful legend, there he will be in the midst of them.

V.

After these lessons the poet feels no inclination to seek a new church. He thinks Christ has led him to these places to teach a lesson of tolerance. He was so impatient with the noisy people in the vulgar chapel; and the master, he thinks, wished to correct his petulance by showing how, in all the different forms of religion, men come into communion with Eternal Love. A new kind of self-satisfaction creeps over his mind. He will try to "bear with" even the forms of faith most repugnant to his own tastes. This tolerance is a pleasant, genial mood. He will try to cultivate a mild indifferentism by looking at the good which may be found in the most erroneous creeds. He will still value religion for its own sake, and be careless about the sects who dress it up in such various and often grotesque garbs. Like the man in Tennyson's *Palace of Art*, he will

Sit as God, owning no form of creed,
But contemplating all.

As he was basking in this lazy glow of benevolence, suddenly the storm rose in fury, the hurricane flung him on the college steps, the hem of the garment was swept out of his hand, and far away he saw the Figure disappearing from his gaze.

Tolerance!—was that the only lesson he had learnt from Christ's presence in the chapel, the cathedral and the lecture-room? If that was all, then he was further

from the Master than the ignorant preacher, the superstitious papist and the sceptical professor. A lazy indifference!—was that all he had gained, when the supreme truth revealed to him was LOVE,—a love all-embracing and self-sacrificing? Then, in shame and grief, the poet raises himself from his self-complacent mood and vows to live for others. He will gain no higher truth, feel no purer emotion, but he will share it with his fellow-men. Every gift and grace which God bestows on him, he will use for others. He will live in the life of men, share their strife, spend himself to enlighten their ignorance and cure their sin.

For I, a man, with men am linked,
And not a brute with brutes; no gain
That I experience, must remain
Unshared.

As that diviner spirit takes possession of him, he finds himself catching the hem of the flying robe, wrapped in its folds, carried along in the train of the gracious Master, until he discovers that he is still seated in the little chapel listening to the noisy sermon.

And I caught
At the flying robe, and unrepelled
Was lapped again in its folds full-fraught
With warmth, and wonder and delight,
God's mercy being infinite.
For scarce had the words escaped my tongue,
When, at a passionate bound, I sprung
Out of the wandering world of rain,
Into the little chapel again.

And, how differently he regards the service! He sees that even the muddy water of error may contain a stream

from the river of life; from a poor, broken, earthen vessel parched lips may quench their thirst. These poor ruins of humanity, the flesh worn to rags and tatters, the soul at struggle with insanity,—in this chapel they, doubtless, find a comfort and peace worth to them more than the gain of an empire. He thinks of the Pope, and hopes that when he is tired of his “posturings and petticoat-ings,” he may be blest with that treasure of divine love which all the forms of superstition struggle to express. He remembers the worn-out Professor, criticising the gospel, trying to preserve the ghost of love by reverencing a myth, and he trusts that when his cough shakes his body into the grave, when thicker and thicker the darkness falls upon the world seen through his spectacles, then he may find in Christ more than a fable, even the embodiment of divine Love. As he thus meditates, the sermon ends; he hears the hymn given out; he joins with the rest in the chorus, to conclude with the doxology.

Easter Day.

In *Christmas Eve* Browning represents Christ as the supreme manifestation of the love of God; in *Easter Day* Christ appears as Judge, pronouncing the sentence of Divine Love on a man who has chosen the world and lived for self.

I.

Again the poet is crossing the common near to which stood the white-washed chapel. It is the evening before Easter Sunday, and he begins to ponder the marvellous

revelation Christianity has made. Over and over again has he heard the story of the life of Christ, and been taught the doctrines of Immortality and Judgment. And now in the solitude of this bleak common he asks himself what Christianity really means to him, what effect these doctrines have had on his own life. Let me, he says, try to think of religion no longer as a theory but a solemn fact.

I asked

Fairly and frankly, what might be
That History, that Faith, to me
—Me there—not me in some domain
Built up and peopled by my brain,
Weighing its merits as one weighs
Mere theories for blame or praise,
—The Kingcraft of the Lucumons,
Or Fourier's scheme, its pros and cons,—
But *my* faith there, or none at all.

He determines to put the case as strongly as he can,—suppose he dropped down dead that moment, how would it be with him, what would happen to him, what verdict would God pass upon his life?

How were my case now, did I fall
Dead here, this minute,—should I lie
Faithful or faithless?

He tries to take a common-sense view of the matter. Really, he thinks he need have little fear to appear before the Judgment seat of God. On the whole he has been a decent man and a good Christian. Of course he has had his faults and failings, but there is all the more credit to him that, in spite of sense and passion, he has made real progress in the religious life and built up his character in Christian faith. If he does not deserve

the name of Christian, who does ? If he is not fit for the Judgment Day, who is ? Indeed he is so satisfied with himself, that he almost wishes God's Kingdom would instantly come, that he might hear the approving sentence and enter on his eternal reward. "Why," he cries, "how appropriate it would be for the Judgment to take place on Easter Sunday morning, when the world is clothed in the promise of the Spring, when men are least prepared for such a dreadful event ! Suppose, now, the heaven were to open, the trumpet to sound, the great white throne to descend !"

II.

While he thus talked in easy self-complacence, lo ! the whole heaven glowed and palpitated with a surging ocean of fire. A gorgeous aurora borealis shot its vivid lightnings across the sky, and every cloud seemed charged with flame. In *Christmas Eve* the lunar rainbow brought the vision of Christ as incarnate Love ; here the blazing aurora brings the vision of Christ as final Judge. It seems to the poet that the Judgment Day, indeed, is come, there is no escape, he must realise his fate. And, in a moment, he feels, without being told, what the verdict on his life must be. All doubt and darkness end, and he knows that he is convicted of *having chosen the world*. Even his religion has been a worldly thing, a sort of extra condiment to add a delicate flavour to the banquet of life. His faith had never carried him out of himself, it was only a kind of æsthetic charm to sweeten the commonplaces of existence. Yes ! even in his religion he knew that he had chosen the world.

There, stood I, formed and fixed, I knew,
Choosing the world. The choice was made;
 And naked and disguiseless stayed,
 And unevadable, the fact.

We at first expect to see him crushed to the earth in terror and dismay. But no!—his self-complacency sustains him in the dreadful hour. Both brain and heart keep calm; he summons up courage to make a defence and apologise for the choice he has made. And a very clever defence he makes. He says to the Judge, "Yet it was Thy world I chose."

I resolved to say,
 So was I framed by Thee, such way
 I put to use thy senses here!
 It was so beautiful, so near,
 Thy world,—what could I then but choose
 My part there?

How could the Judge condemn him to hell for making the best of a world created so good and fair, for gratifying the senses with which he found himself endowed by God?

III.

In the midst of his apology, another burst of fire like blood

Overbroke all heaven in one flood of doom.

Then there descended a blinding shower of ashes, then darkness shrouded all things, and out of the darkness came a voice proclaiming:—

Life is done,
 Time ends, Eternity's begun,
 And thou art judged for evermore.

As the voice passed, the man looked up, and there standing between earth and heaven, was the awful form of Christ.

He stood there. Like the smoke
Pillared o'er Sodom, when day broke,—
I saw him.

But he sees Him not as he appeared on Christmas Eve in garments of dazzling white which caught up the disciple in their sheltering folds; now he appears clothed in darkness blacker than the deepest midnight.

One magnificent pall
Mantled in massive fold and fall
His dread, and coiled in snaky swathes
About His feet: night's black, that bathes
All else, broke, grizzled with despair,
Against the soul of blackness there.
A gesture told His mood within—
That wrapped right hand which bared the chin,
That intense meditation fixed
On His procedure,—pity mixed
With the fulfilment of decree.
Motionless, thus, He spoke to me,
Who fell before His feet, a mass,
No man now.

Eternal Love is the Judge to decide the destiny on saint and sinner. And the vastness of the Love measures the direness of the condemnation. With divine pity in His face Christ looks upon the stricken man crouching at His feet, and speaks the words of doom. He tells him that his life was given him to make his choice between the earthly and heavenly, between the shows of time and the realities of eternity. And he knows how he has chosen:—

This world,
This finite life, thou hast preferred,
In disbelief of God's own word,
To Heaven and to Infinity.

Even his spiritual powers he has employed merely to give new zest to the pleasures of sense and to explore more fully the passing beauties of the world. What shall be the penalty of such a choice? The man trembles to hear the sentence; he imagines the Judge will condemn him to some frightful hell.

At this point Browning shows himself a profound spiritual teacher. Christ condemns to no hell of fire and brimstone, he inflicts no outward punishment. The man's *Choice* shall be his *Doom*. Since he has forgotten the realities of eternity, he shall remain for ever amidst the empty shows of time,—unvisited by one gleam of the light and love he has ignored. He has chosen the world, then let him keep the world:—

Thou art shut
Out of the heaven of spirit: glut
Thy sense upon the world: 'tis thine
For ever—take it.

That is the judgment,—the opening of the man's book of life, the unfolding of interior character, the revelation of what HE IS when all disguises are removed. What art thou, in thine inmost self, as seen by the eye of God? The answer to that question shall be thy final doom. That is the penalty of sin,—the sin itself with all its dire consequences in the soul. "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still;"—his filthiness shall be his punishment. The miser has chosen his gold,—then let

him keep it, and spend eternity in counting up some visionary treasure;—his avarice shall be his penalty. The man whose heart is full of hatred can, surely, have no more dreadful doom than to feel the malice eating away at his heart,—his hatred shall be his hell. “And for thee,” says Christ, “who hast desired nothing better than the unrestrained enjoyment of the earth, it shall seem as though the world continued as before, as though no judgment had swept it into nothingness. For thee the shows of time shall continue; the woods shall wave, the waters flow, men shall still seem to go about pursuing their works; thou shalt have the pleasures of time, the joys of sense; only now there shall come no visiting of God’s spirit to strive with thee and to draw thee away from earthly shadows into heavenly realities; let *that* be thy fate” :—

So, once more, take thy world ! expend
Eternity upon its shows,—
Flung thee as freely as one rose
Out of a summer’s opulence,
Over the Eden-barrier whence
Thou art excluded. Knock in vain !

The door is shut; the man is excluded from the grandeurs of spiritual destiny; God simply lets him alone, and leaves him to the choice he has made.

V.

We must remember that this man was crouching at Christ’s feet, expecting to be sentenced to some dreadful hell. But, as he listens, he takes courage. This a punishment !—why, he will take such a doom with joy !

“How? Is mine,
The world?” (I cried while my soul broke
Out in a transport,) “Hast thou spoke
Plainly in that? Earth’s exquisite
Treasures of wonder and delight,
For me?”

He rose from the ground; the terror was gone; his heart beat calmly again. “All the world,” he said, “is mine!” He picked a leaf of fern from the common, he looked at it and thought, “Why even if I begin with this tiny form of life, there are myriads of other kinds of ferns, each as unique and beautiful as this. Think, what endless search there must be from this first specimen to the last! Conceive, then, the resources of all the earth! Vast, exhaustless beauty, endless change of wonder,—all this is mine. The world is mine; my feet shall range its whole extent; my eyes shall take in its boundless wealth.”

As he thus receives his fate with joy, the voice of Christ, in yet sterner accents, falls upon his ear. “Ah,” He says, “are you *so* satisfied with the many coloured veil, whose folds adorn this earth the ante-chamber to God’s presence? Be welcome, then, to its shows of finite beauty! But there have been wiser men, who, from the glories of the earth, were able to discover what royalties must be prepared in the presence-chamber of the Divine. As for thee, a leaf of fern is able to entangle thy mind, and keep thee from seeking the spiritual purpose of thy life. These earthly forms were made so fair, to give some hints of the Supernal Beauty. All partial loveliness is a pledge of beauty in its plenitude. But thou art satisfied with the earthly

hints, the partial pledges. Take them ! try to satisfy thyself with them ; remain shut out for ever from the Beatific Vision."

V.

These reproachful words brought an inward despair. "But yet," the man answers, "even if the things of nature cease to satisfy my soul, yet there is that higher nature which men call ART. It is the artist who gives deeper meaning and subtler beauty to the world, and makes dead matter instinct with thought and feeling. Here, then, is something which makes life worth living ; I will be a student of art ; I will seek the statuary of Greece, the painting of Italy ; and with such a store of loveliness, need I mourn that my doom is to possess the present world ?"

As he chooses, the voice again answers :—"Take it ; try to satisfy thyself with these finite creations of art. But remember that the greatest artists themselves felt that their finest works were only hints of the Perfect Ideal, only isolated parts of the Infinite Truth." How could he be satisfied with art alone, when the inspiration of true art is the effort of the soul to rise into the fulness of God ? The test of the genuine artist is his divine discontent. The very stamp of genius is a sense of imperfection, the desire to reach towards some finer form. The sculptor or painter feels ashamed when the crowds press in to behold and adore his work. Ah ! if they could only guess how grand his vision, then how poor would seem the statue or the painting. Man's pursuit of art should be the education for an immortal life of power and progress. For example, we marvel at

the creations of Michael Angelo, the miraculous works of his genius ; but if such was his soul's capacity on earth, what must be his greatness, now he is clothed upon in immortality !—

What visions will his right hand's sway
Still turn to form, as still they burst
Upon him ? How will he quench thirst
Titanically infantine,
Laid at the breast of the Divine ?

So, the voice continues to say, all this present world, the broad expanse of heaven with its unnumbered stars, all displays of earthly power and beauty, all the matchless creations of genius, wonderful as they appear, are only the furniture of life's first stage, the adornments of this earthly ante-chamber to the eternal palace of the Great King. "Go !" says the voice, "chain thy soul to these outward forms ; forget the spiritual reality ; take human art for thy portion ; thy choice still shall be thy doom."

VI.

Still the man will do his best to be satisfied with the world. He will try to satisfy himself with KNOWLEDGE. Though he is shut out of heaven, yet he can sweep his intellect through all the circles of sciences, philosophies and histories. The pursuit of Knowledge is so exhaustless, as to be practically infinite ; and he will almost feel as though his chain was broken and eternity was made his own.

And yet, as his hope dawns, he feels it must end in failure. This time he does not wait for the voice to

answer. Instantly, he feels within himself that intellect alone cannot satisfy the hunger of his soul; at every turn in his pursuit, he will hear the whisper,—“What is the good of it all? whereto does all your Knowledge serve?” To toil on the treadmill of finite facts, never to rise any nearer to the Infinite and Eternal, to spin for ever in ceaseless circles through the realms of science,—can that ever satisfy the longings of the soul? Then the voice speaks and corroborates the verdict. Earthly Knowledge is in vain without the vision of heavenly wisdom. The greatest minds regarded their intuitions of truth but as gleams and flashes to sting their souls with hunger for the fulness of God’s light. Now, they have left the shadowed earth with its broken rays of truth; they dwell in that kingdom where the Lord God is the unclouded Sun of an Eternal Day. “As for thee,” says Christ, “thou hast chosen the earthly shadows; take thy world of Knowledge; thy choice is still thy doom!”

VII.

NATURE, ART, KNOWLEDGE,—these are found to be vain apart from that spiritual life out of which the soul is now shut for ever. A new thought comes to the despairing man. Cannot he choose to devote himself to human LOVE? Even though he only lives in a spectral world and the men and women around him are only masks and shows, yet, remembering how Love used to bless and save the world, he will still hold it sacred. Earthly LOVE shall be his final choice.

This time he thought Christ would look down on

him with pity and approval; and to his horror, the form of the Judge appeared more dreadful than ever, and the inflicting voice again smote his ear. Forsooth! when everything else fails, he chooses Love merely as a last resort. Even his thought of Love is poisoned with selfishness; he only seeks it to give zest to his wretched doom; to reconcile himself to a hopeless lot, he chooses to try to satisfy himself with this spectral Love of the masks and shows of men and women. This ghastly simulacrum he makes his choice; and yet, through all his life, the eternal Love of God has been surrounding him and seeking him. Love was inextricably bound up with the power and beauty of the world. Love was the very basis of the plan by which earth was made the training-place for heaven. Nature, Art, Knowledge,—these were designed by Love to draw the soul to itself, and clasp it in the embrace of God. And, all the time, this man shrank into his selfishness, and often doubted God's perfect goodness. Again the sentence comes,—“Thou hast shut thyself out from that Eternal Love that lives and reigns for ever; then have thy desire, satisfy thyself with the shows and shadows of earthly affection; thy choice is still thy doom.”

VIII.

At last, the man is conquered. He cannot endure to be left to himself. He feels that to be abandoned to his own selfish choice is the most dreadful doom of all. Let him either die, or else be given, at least, the ghost of hope to make existence endurable:—

Thou Love of God! Or let me die,
Or grant what shall seem Heaven almost!
Let me not know that all is lost,
Though lost it be—leave me not tied
To this despair, this corpse-like bride!
Let that old life seem mine—no more—
With limitation as before,
With darkness, hunger, toil, distress:
Be all the world a wilderness!
Only let me go on, go on,
Still hoping ever and anon
To reach one eve the Better Land.

As he shook off the old self-confident satisfaction, and asked, at any price to be given hope, endeavour and progress,—

Then did the Form expand, expand—
I knew Him through the dread disguise,
As the whole God within His eyes
Embraced me.

The vision passed, the man woke, the night was gone, and Easter morn was breaking in the east. Was it a reality or a dream? He can scarcely tell. Sometimes the terror of the vision returns to him; he shudders to think that perchance it was all true, that he is condemned, that he is living in a spectral world, that knowledge and beauty and love are merely the ghosts which he has chosen, that God's Spirit is denied him, that immortal blessedness can never more be his, that he has made his choice and that his choice is still his doom. At other times he thinks it was a dreadful dream, which, indeed, has brought a great lesson. And then he thanks God for the struggle of existence, and for the warnings of His Spirit against the sins of self

and sense. He is happy to know that God has not given him up, and heaven has not shut its door. Still he hopes to lay hold of eternal life; and, however hard it may be, he still will try to be a Christian.

But Easter-Day breaks! But
Christ rises! Mercy every day
Is infinite,—and who can say?

CHAPTER IV.

POEMS ON LOVE.

Ay, marriage is the life-long miracle,
The self-begetting wonder, daily fresh;
The Eden, where the spirit and the flesh
Are one again, and new-born souls walk free,
And name in mystic language all things new.

Charles Kingsley, The Saint's Tragedy.

1.—THE ASCENSION OF LOVE.

BROWNING is one of our most original poets, but like all great thinkers for the last twenty-five centuries he owes much of his teaching to the philosophy of Plato. Especially in his poems on love, I find him an ardent disciple of the Greek philosopher. I would advise those who are studying Browning, to read a translation of Plato's dialogue called *The Banquet*. Let me, in a few sentences, describe the doctrine taught in this dialogue,—a doctrine which was the inspiration of Dante in Italy as well as of Browning in England. Plato introduces us to a number of Athenians in the company of Socrates, as they are discussing the nature of love. Each one does his best to give an adequate definition;

and at last the turn comes to Socrates. He confesses himself far too ignorant to attempt such a hazardous task. But once, he says, he paid a visit to a wise prophetess, who told him some wonderful secrets which he will do his best to reveal. After explaining the instincts of animals and the desires of man, the prophetess declared that these were only lower stages of a divine passion, which, in its ascension, divests itself of everything temporal and material, and rises into the love of a supernal Beauty which is spiritual and eternal. He who aspires after the perfect Love, must first seek to discern the Beauty which shines through the forms of earthly objects. These earthly objects, in their endless variety, must gradually suggest to him the one divine Ideal of loveliness, whose pure light is refracted in these changing forms. This contemplation of the celestial Ideal will then raise a stronger love for beauty of soul than for that of body, so that a pure and noble character will quicken a sacred passion, infinitely higher than that which we feel when we are attracted by the mere outward form. Thus the aspiring mind rises into the vision of a moral and intellectual world, filled with lovely and majestic forms of wisdom, truth, and holiness; and now, reaching forward to that which is the goal of all its efforts, on a sudden it beholds a Beauty ineffable, in whose love and joy the soul is satisfied; for it is the Fountain of all being, the celestial Pattern of all earthly good. Those, continued the prophetess, who seek to gain the highest life, begin to ascend through these transitory objects towards that which is the supreme Beauty, in the knowledge and contemplation of which

they at length repose. Such a life, she declared, spent in the contemplation of the Beautiful, is the life for men to live. How transcendent must be the life of him who dwells with and gazes on that eternal Loveliness, which it becomes us all to seek. To such a man is granted the prerogative of dwelling in immediate fellowship with the All-perfect; and, as his life is made more and more divine, he becomes dear to God and lays hold of immortal blessedness.

These few sentences give the meagrest account of the sublime description of the ascension of love from flesh to spirit, from earth to heaven, from time to eternity. Such love, in its highest function, is the interpreter and mediator between things human and things divine; it is not so much an individual passion, as the aspiration to rise out of self and identify the being with the All-perfect. It has been said that the highest form of love is that "in which its personal elements seem to fade and disappear, and it becomes not so much a desire as a revelation, an inlet into some supernal world, approachable only through the annihilation of self." With Plato, love is the unutterable sigh of the finite for the Infinite. The passion for earthly forms of loveliness, the attraction of noble souls, the ceaseless search for higher truths,—all these emotions are the longing of the human spirit for an eternal Beauty, unchanging and divine.

This, essentially, is the teaching of Browning, with this difference:—in the time of Plato women were regarded as radically inferior to men; hence the Philosopher never mentions the possibility of the ascension of love being aided by the attraction of a

woman's spiritual beauty. But, with our Christian poet, the passion of love becomes most adequate to its highest function, when it exists between man and woman. The unconditional gift of man and woman to each other seems to him the end for which the world is made, the chief factor in accomplishing the purpose of creation, the elemental germ from which eternal destiny must be unfolded. We need this teaching. For, indeed, we too often think of love as the comic element in life. Flirtation and courtship are our choice themes for jokes and laughter. Marriage, we say, is a lottery, —a whim of two people who take the terrible risk of living together till death releases them. But, with Browning, these themes are of the most solemn importance. He teaches us that love is the revelation in humanity of a cosmic energy, which has its origin in the nature of God. And, with repeated emphasis, he tells us that the moment we become possessed by a supreme love is a crisis on which eternity depends. These are the three points which help us to interpret these poems: 1, The divine origin of Love; 2, its earthly crisis; 3, its eternal issues.

Browning would maintain that our poets and novelists are quite right, when they make love the chief subject of their songs and stories. Smile as we may at this ever recurring theme, set to ten thousand various tunes, yet we know that it is of perennial interest. "The sense of the world is short, to love and to be beloved." With scarcely any exaggeration we may say that the world exists for the sake of love. The home is the creation of manly and womanly affection; and all the activities of politics and industry exist for the sake

of the home,—to protect it, to supply its needs, to make it beautiful. Take away the enthusiasm of home, and soon you have no enthusiasm of humanity; our civilization would soon fall asunder, without that golden thread of love to hold it together. Our best poets have told us how upon this passion depends, most frequently, a man's redemption or ruin. Salvation by love is finely taught by Tennyson:—

For indeed I know
Of no more subtle master under heaven
Than is the maiden passion for a maid,
Not only to keep down the base in man,
But teach high thought, and amiable words,
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,
And love of truth, and all that makes a man.

That is the theme of which Browning frequently treats. No one ever believed more firmly that the salvation of a man depends on the woman he loves. The earliest emotions may, indeed, be awakened by beauty of form, but love is made perfect when the attractions of the body become the sacraments of the spirit. } He teaches the relation of body and soul in these lines:—

Where is the use of the lip's red charm,
The heaven of hair, the pride of the brow,
And the blood that blues the inside arm—
Unless we turn, as the soul knows how,
The earthly gift to an end divine?

He believes in the Christian doctrine of the Redemption of the Body;* he agrees with another poet that when man is made perfect, "his very flesh will become a great poem." He frankly recognises the function of the

* *Romans* viii. 23.

physical nature in the development of the higher life. As his own wife said of him, "he is human at the red-ripe of the heart." In all his poems there is not a touch of sickly sentimentalism or self-conscious asceticism. Instead of abusing and mortifying the body, he believes in the possibility of its complete harmony with the noblest ends. In that remarkable verse of *Rabbi Ben Ezra* he teaches that the impulses of sense may help the soul to rise :—

Let us not always say
 "Spite of the flesh to-day
 I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!"
 As the bird wings and sings,
 Let us cry, "All good things
 Are ours, nor soul helps flesh, more, now, than flesh helps soul."

That is worth pondering,—when we attain to the "redemption of the body," the flesh will help the soul to achieve its destiny, just as much as the soul now helps to transfigure the functions of the flesh.

2.—THE CRISIS OF LOVE.

In many of these poems Browning describes a crisis in spiritual experience, brought about by the flashing of love from one soul to another. In *Cristina* the words are evidently spoken by a man whose soul has been slumbering all his life, and here we are told how it wakes up within him. He has toiled and thought, but without any enthusiasm; he has few friends, and no one seems attracted by him or to understand him. His history has been chiefly one of failures and disappointments; if anyone has ever said a kindly word

to him, it has only been in pitying condescension. But one day he makes the great discovery of the soul. In a mixed company a woman looks at him, and instantly his soul awakes to its true endowments and immortal greatness. It was no mere glance of pitiful kindness and passing attention; it was the revelation of spirit to spirit; in a moment the man and woman understood each other, and felt that their destinies were united. But it was only a glance. The lady was in a social position far above the obscure man on whom she had centred the magnetism of her eyes. In a moment it was all over; she had trampled out the flame which had flashed up within her heart; and, in derision for such passing sentiment, she had plunged again into the shallow, worldly life to which she belonged.

At first the man feels angry with her. Why did she waken his soul if she was not willing to satisfy its hunger?

She should never have looked at me
If she meant I should not love her!
There are plenty—men you call such,
I suppose she may discover
All her soul to, if she pleases,
And yet leave much as she found them:
But I'm not so, and she knew it
When she fixed me, glancing round them.

The suggestion comes; "Oh! she only looked at you; she meant nothing." But this he indignantly repudiates.

What? to fix me thus meant nothing?
But I can't tell (there's my weakness)
What her look said;—no vile cant, sure,
About "need to strew the bleakness

Of some lone shore with its pearl-seed,
That the sea feels,"—no "strange yearning
That such souls have, most to lavish
Where there's chance of least returning."

People might say the glance meant nothing ; but he knew better. To him it was much more than a glance. Though he had not so much as touched her hand, his soul, in one ineffable moment, had become blended with hers ; and through all eternity he felt he would be a different man for that wonderful experience. The old, weary, aimless life was gone ; he saw, he felt, he knew all the surpassing endowments of his nature, all the divine meaning of his life. That revelation, in its intense quality, was worth more than all the monotonous years which had gone before.

Oh, we're sunk enough here, God knows !
But not quite so sunk that moments,
Sure though seldom, are denied us,
When the spirit's true endowments
Stand out plainly from its false ones,
And apprise it if pursuing
Or the right way or the wrong way,
To its triumph or undoing.

There are flashes struck from midnights,
There are fire-flames noondays kindle,
Whereby piled-up honours perish,
Whereby swollen ambitions dwindle,
While just this or that poor impulse,
Which for once had away unstified,
Seems the whole work of a life-time
That away the rest have trifled.

There we have an instance of Browning's doctrine that the supreme crisis in character is precipitated by the

flash of love, and, in the closing verses, we learn that the consequences of such a crisis are eternal. There comes to this man the conviction that this is the one event towards which all his earthly career has been moving; and if he wastes the golden opportunity, his life must for ever go darkling down into miserable failure. In verse v. we have a striking instance of the influence of Plato, who taught that the soul existed before its life on earth, that life on earth was only a visit for the purpose of gathering up its energies for another cycle of being in an eternal world. It seems to this man as though that flash of love had revealed to him the pre-existence of his soul, its life in some mysterious realm, before it was born on earth. And, he thinks that the birth of his soul into this world was ordained for the very purpose of securing self-conscious identity, by mingling in perfect love with the soul of a kindred woman.

Doubt you, if, in some such moment,
As she fixed me, she felt clearly,
Ages past the soul existed,
Here an age 'tis resting merely,
And hence fleets again for ages,
While the true end, sole and single,
It stops here for is, this love way,
With some other soul to mingle?

That, he thinks, is the one purpose why the soul is clothed in flesh and sent to pass through the discipline of earth. And unless the discipline of earth effects that purpose, it will never be accomplished in any future world. As far as this result is concerned, the soul suffers eternal loss. Other things may be attained,

but this one thing, for which our life here is ordained, can never be achieved. That is what he says in verse vi., the soul, in *this world*, must learn the experience of love,—

Else it loses what it lived for,
And eternally must lose it ;
Better ends may be in prospect,
Deeper blisses if you chose it),
But this life's end and this love-bliss
Have been lost here. Doubt you whether
This she felt as, looking at me,
Mine and her souls rushed together ?

That is what he blames her for ; she knew, as well as he did, that in the magnetic glance an eternal prize was at stake ; and yet she allowed considerations of earthly pride to sweep it from her.

Oh, observe ! Of course, next moment,
The world's honours, in derision,
Trampled out the light for ever :
Never fear but there's provision
Of the devil's to quench knowledge
Lest we walk the earth in rapture !
Making those who catch God's secret
Just so much more prize their capture !

But *he* has not trampled out the light ; *he* has caught God's secret, and will keep it for ever. This love is a cleansing, strengthening, sustaining power, an intensifying of the whole vital energy of manhood. Never can he lose the rapture, the aspiration, the faith, which her glance has quickened in his soul. Life for him, has become a solemn and serious thing. Though he shall never set eyes on her again, yet her soul is blended with

his; and, in their united strength, he will sweep his way, through all the obstructions of time, into the freedom of eternity.

The poem closes with an utterance of triumph. It may be thus divided:—

I. II. The Crisis.

III. IV. The Discovery of the Soul.

V. VI. The Revelation of the Soul's past Career.

VII. VIII. The Prophecy of the Soul's Eternal Triumph.

First we have a description of the glance; we are told its meaning in the present; then we have its revelation of the past,—the state of pre-existence through which the soul travelled towards this one supreme movement. Now, in the closing verse, we find that the glance foretells an everlasting destiny:—

Such am I: the secret's mine now!
 She has lost me, I have found her;
 Her soul's mine: and thus, grown perfect,
 I shall pass my life's remainder,
 Life will just hold out the proving
 Both our powers, alone and blended:
 And then, come the next life quickly!
 This world's use will have been ended.

This poem tells us of a love which most people would describe as a failure. But, though the man knows he can never possess the woman he loves, there is no groaning and sighing about disappointment and despair, no whimpering about life being ruined, spoilt, and blasted. No! his life is made, constituted, strengthened. Now he knows what he is capable of,—even the energy of a love like this; and, through all the future, existence

shall be used to test his power and prove what such an energy can do.

3.—THE CONSUMMATION OF LOVE.

In *Cristina* we saw the power of a love that seemed to result in failure; what, then, shall not a triumphant love be able to achieve? If that single glance was enough to make a man strong to face the toils of life, the terrors of death, the splendours of eternity, what must be the bliss of souls who give themselves to each other through years of perfect wedded love? Browning thinks that men and women are weak, that they waste and squander their strength, because they do not blend their minds and consciences and souls into a spiritual unity. Such spiritual oneness alone he regards as worthy of the name of love, and such love as that would be able to conquer the world.

If any two creatures grew into one,
They would do more than the world has done;
Though each apart were never so weak,
Yet vainly through the world should ye seek
For the knowledge and the right,
Which in their union grew their might.

That is, when two souls grow to be one, their union cannot be measured merely by adding the sum of their separate powers, any more than a mechanical mingling of oxygen and hydrogen can give you the unique qualities of water. A perfect marriage develops in man and woman undreamt-of energies, and evolves a new and profounder consciousness.

In his *Banquet* Plato makes the comedian, Aristo-

phanes, give his account of the origin of love. He says that, in the beginning, the sexes were united in each human being. But the extraordinary power developed by these androgynous creatures made Zeus so jealous that he ordered Phœbus to cut them in two, that henceforth man and woman might exist in separate personalities. Ever since, these two portions of humanity have been seeking to unite themselves together again. The male feels incomplete without the female; the female is imperfect without the male. And if every man could find the woman to whom he eternally belongs, then, through these perfect marriages, mankind would attain its pristine greatness, and become a match even for the immortal gods. Swedenborg gives a curious illustration of this in one of his visions. He says that, once, when he visited the highest heaven, he saw a radiant angel, with whom he desired intensely to converse. The very strength of his desire drew the angel towards him, when lo! as the celestial being drew nearer, two angels appeared, male and female, so perfectly blended in marriage that, in the distance, they appeared to be one. And there is a beautiful Eastern apologue to the same effect. One came and knocked at the Beloved's door; and a voice asked from within, "Who is there?" and he answered, "It is I." Then the voice said, "This house will not hold me and thee." And the door was not opened. Then went the Lover into the desert, and fasted and prayed in solitude. And after a year he returned, and knocked again at the door. And again the voice asked, "Who is there?" and he said, "It is thyself!" and the door was opened to him.

And Browning, from his own experience, knew that

such divine blessedness comes to certain elect souls. When the man and woman, designed for each other by eternal Fate, approach, then there is an instant recognition; when they blend their beings, they find a surpassing joy. That is why some lovers know each other in one swift glance of recognition. They do not marry themselves; they find themselves married; they already belong to each other by a spiritual law, of which the outward bond is the seal and sacrament. The only words they need to speak are these,—“I am thine and thou art mine.” In *The Ring and the Book*, in one of the most pathetic passages, the dying Pompilia reaches this transcendent view of human love. She has been sold to the wretched Count; to her, poor child! marriage on earth, instead of being a sacrament, has been a profanation. And yet the frightful curse of her wedded life makes her realise that there must be some purer, diviner love. She says :—

Marriage on earth seems such a counterfeit,
Mere imitation of the inimitable :
In heaven we have the real and true and sure.
'Tis there they neither marry nor are given
In marriage, but are as the angels : right,
Oh how right that is, how like Jesus Christ
To say that! Marriage-making for the earth,
With gold so much,—birth, power, repute so much,
Or beauty, youth so much, in lack of these !
Be as the angels rather, who, apart,
Know themselves into one, are found at length
Married, but marry never, no, nor give
In marriage ; they are Man and Wife at once
When the true time is : here we have to wait
Not so long neither !

Robert Browning knew that such a marriage was possible on earth. In a dramatic lyric, *By the Fireside*, he tells us how he won his own perfect wife. In this poem, a man past middle life is sitting by the fireside; he puts away the learned Greek book he has been studying, and looks at his wife who sits close by. He ponders on the old age so quickly approaching; then he begins to think of the love that must make the end of life more blessed than even the exuberant youth-time. He says life has led him

To an age so blest that by its side
Youth seems the waste instead.

In comparison with that one beatitude, the other events of the past seem almost trivial. The paths of knowledge, the career of enterprise and endeavour seem to him only like the outer, trodden, public ways of a forest, which all converge into one sacred shrine in its inmost depths. And so, as memory wanders through the years gone by, he quickly finds himself in Italy, in the well-known spot where the two lovers gave themselves to each other in an unspeakable gift. That is the meaning of the rather obscure verse v. He compares his life to a thick wood which he is exploring. The skirts of the wood are of hazel trees, which symbolise the experience of his life in England. As he journeys backward, from manhood to youth, the wood grows thicker, he is surrounded by rarer trees, which seem to be leading to an inner sanctuary; at last he finds himself in Italy, and on the very spot in that lovely land where he and his wife confessed their devotion. How every detail of the Italian scenery is photographed on his mind! All

Nature seemed to be in vital harmony with the love they felt and the vows they made. That moment, one and infinite, gathered up all the blessedness that time or eternity could bestow. And the prize he won, when she gave herself to him!—why, he says that

A man should strive and agonize,
And taste a veriest hell on earth
For the hope of such a prize.

The very essence of the man's personality was concentrated into that hour; he was born on purpose to love this woman; and out of this love was to be unfolded every divine capacity of character and genius. Living the very life he desired for himself, he was also able to help the great purpose of God in the universal plan. Then he was made, then he knew himself, then his soul awakened into clear consciousness of the divine will concerning him, and of his own joyful co-operation with the infinite purpose.

I am named and known by that moment's feat;
There took my station and degree;
So grew my own small life complete,
As nature obtained her best of me—
One born to love you, sweet!

So earth has gained by one man the more,
And the gain of earth must be heaven's gain too!
And the whole is well worth thinking o'er
When Autumn comes: which I mean to do
One day, as I said before.

And, while this love seems perfected on earth, he is certain it will be propagated into eternity. How will the change of death, he ponders, affect this union of

their souls? Surely, since it is a union of souls, the decay of the body cannot touch such an indissoluble bond.

Think, when our one soul understands
The great word which makes all things new,
When earth breaks up and heaven expands,
How will the change strike me and you
In the house not made with hands?

And then he thinks how his wife has led him upward in this world above all baser things,—how she has purified and perfected his soul; and he prays that in heaven, too, she may be his guardian angel, still to go before him, revealing the path of light, and expounding the mysteries of eternity.

Oh, I must feel your brain prompt mine,
Your heart anticipate my heart,
You must be just before, in fine,
See, and make me see, for your part,
New depths in the divine!

I cannot help recalling how that thought of Woman leading Man into the supreme purity and joy is brought out by two other poets. In the second part of Goethe's drama, Faust is represented passing away from earth; his love is now transfigured from selfish desire into divine attraction; the woman he wronged is now a ministering spirit; the glorified Margaret comes to lead the wandering man into heaven; as the angels express it in their mystic chorus:—

All things transitory
But as symbols are sent:
Earth's insufficiency
Here grows to event:

The Indescribable,
 Here it is done :
The Woman-Soul leadeth us
*Upward and on.**

And the Poet Dante, in his *New Life* and also in his *Paradise*, teaches the same truth. His passion for the sainted Beatrice rises into the ideal of heavenly purity, and she guides his way to the celestial vision of that Eternal Love, which "moves the sun in heaven and all the stars." Just as solemn and beautiful was Browning's devotion to his perfect wife.

It seems inevitable that such an absolute union of souls should survive the stroke of death. But what shall we say concerning the unfulfilled affections, which are cut short by death before the great vow can be ratified? Such love, Browning says, must also find its consummation hereafter; and life, surely, needs nothing more to sustain it than such a boundless hope of everlasting re-union. In that lovely lyric, *Evelyn Hope*, he tells us of a noble, cultured man, who conceives the purest affection for a beautiful maiden. As yet, she is too young for words of love to be whispered in her ear. Her placid life must not yet be disturbed by such a confession as he longs to make. He watches her grow more beautiful and gracious every day, and waits until the hour when he will crown his life by asking her to be his. But, alas! before the hour arrived, the young girl faded and died. God's hand beckoned her, and she must go—go away from earth with all its unfulfilled promises of womanhood and

* *Das Ewig-Weibliche*
Zieht uns hinan.

wifehood. Is, then, his love destroyed by this stroke of death? Was this great hope in vain? No! the man believes in God; this love is God's gift, which can never be destroyed nor recalled. He was willing to wait on earth; it is only, now, to wait a little longer, and again he shall find that beautiful soul. He declares it is no mere guess, or longing, or vague anticipation,—this thing is a CERTAINTY. Love is not a mortal thing at the mercy of death; and though his beloved has gone to sleep, one day she "will wake and remember and understand."

I know of no poet who has sung of love in manlier, purer, loftier strains. With him love is the creative power which sustains the universe. That power, which holds all things in organic bonds, reaches its finest expression in the conscious emotion of human souls; and it mounts into its supreme energy when Man and Woman claim each other in a mutual self-surrender, whereby love not only achieves the creative purpose in the race on earth, but also makes two souls heirs of an infinite beatitude. Both in the earthly plan and in the heavenly perfection we must confess, that, of all the gifts and graces of humanity, the greatest is LOVE.


CHAPTER V.

POEMS ON ART.

If all the pens that ever poets held
Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts,
And every sweetness that inspired their hearts,
Their minds, and muses on admired themes ;
If all the heavenly quintessence they still *
From their immortal flowers of poesy,
Wherein, as in a mirror, we perceive
The highest reaches of a human wit ;
If these had made one poem's period,
And all combined in beauty's worthiness,
Yet should there hover in their restless heads
One thought, one grace, one wonder at the least,
Which into words no virtue can digest.

Marlowe, Tamburlaine, Part First, v. 1.

1.—THE FUNCTION OF ART.

 GREAT genius gives us the impression of a kind of omnipotence. Victor Hugo says that genius is a promontory stretching out into the Infinite; and there seems to be scarcely any limit to the extent of its power to explore the secrets of Nature and Man. We are sometimes tempted to fancy that Shakspeare might have done everything he had chosen to attempt.

* Distil.

When a man does one thing supremely well, that single achievement seems the revelation of reserves of power, which might be employed in any direction chosen by the will. The great man himself is always greater than any of his works. Behind a sublime thought, an heroic action, an artistic creation, we feel there must be a SOUL, surpassing in its might this isolated deed of intellect or conscience or imagination. This is the case with Browning. He is a poet because he has not chosen to be a painter or musician. Certainly, he knows as much about pictures and music as he does about poetry, and some of the profoundest truths of art are to be learnt in his writings. He gives us the impression of being such a complete man, with sympathies stretching in so many different directions. In all their wealth of meaning, he might have used the words: "I am a man, and nothing that belongs to man can be foreign to me." All his senses were wide awake; all his instincts were quick and keen. He was not a bundle of faculties, he was a living SOUL, a soul that drank in music through the ear, beauty through the eye, truth through the intellect, love through the heart. And this strenuous soul, in its entirety, is put into his poems; they pulsate with vitality, they vibrate to every faculty and emotion of human nature.

There we strike upon his theory of art. We often say that a true work of art should neither preach nor moralise. Of course, a work of art will be influenced by the moral and religious conditions of the artist; if he be an utterly bad man, his work will be so stained by impurity, as to be condemned by

a consensus of competent judges. But a genuine work of art is the product, not merely of intellect or of conscience, it is the creation of the soul, of that essential personal being which is behind the faculties, using them for the purpose of self-revelation. Browning's emphasis on personality explains his doctrine of the function of art; according to him it is the medium whereby this essential soul reveals itself to other souls who are able to grasp the meaning of a work of genius. A man may teach you truths he has reached by his intellect, and yet you may know very little about him; his discovery of truth may have been a wearisome struggle, and his teaching may be an irksome task. A man may expound the laws of morality, and yet to him duty may be a bondage and a burden. What a man merely knows with his understanding, what a man merely does as a duty,—these are no revelations of the spiritual being and the real self. How then can we reach this deepest arcanum of human nature? Browning says that, before we can reach it, there is a further question. What does a man think?—that is not enough. What does a man's sense of duty make him do?—that is not enough. But *what does a man supremely love?*—ah! there you reach the secret; the answer to that question decides what he is in the abysmal deeps of personality. The SUPREME LOVE,—that is the man himself, the essential individual, the indissoluble being.

Now, more than anything else, art is the revelation of a man's supreme love, the presentment of his soul. A true artist does not paint, or carve, or compose, "as a duty;" he does it because it is what he loves to do

best of all, what he cannot help doing; it is not a mechanical contrivance or an artificial imitation that he produces, it is the vital expression of his own deepest nature. "The self-revelation of a human personality is the one supremely precious and enduring thing. All art is the search for it." And, in the case of great men, this supreme love becomes an over-mastering passion of self-expression. As the Creator manifests his wisdom in an ordered universe, in the heavens and earth which tell his glory and show his handiwork, as nature is the majestic work of a divine Artist,—so human genius is the image of God's creative power, and is under a necessity to pour its wealth of imaginative vision into forms of material beauty. When the soul pours itself in language, it creates a poem; when it fuses forms and colours in the fire of imagination, it creates a picture; when it inspires sounds with ravishing harmony, it creates a strain of music. That is the condition of all true art, that the soul, in ardent passion and glowing vision, puts itself into its work. The production may be literally true, it may be absolutely ethical, but unless it be the vital and passionate expression of the real man in his deepest moods, it is not a work of art. So that a poem or a painting or a musical composition may be regarded from two points of view:

- (i.) The direct impression it makes upon us;
- (ii.) The revelation it gives of the artist who created it.

Browning, as a student of human nature, is more attracted by the second aspect,—the insight which a work of art gives of the artist himself.

X I shall take three poems dealing with painting. In *Old Pictures in Florence*, *Fra Lippo Lippi*, and *Andrea Del Sarto*, we have an artistic trilogy. In the first and last of these he deals with two kinds of failure,—the noble failure which comes of infinite aspiration, and the ignoble failure which comes of resting in a finite perfection. We may distinguish the poems thus:—

- (1.) *Old Pictures in Florence* describes the rise of Italian art in religious paintings.
- (2.) *Fra Lippo Lippi* deals with the second period of Italian art, during the Renaissance, with its frank acceptance of nature and rehabilitation of the flesh.
- (3.) *Andrea Del Sarto* deals with a later period of the Renaissance, when the artistic impulse began to decay; and, instead of creative vitality, there was mechanical perfection and technical skill.

2.—PAINTING.

(i.) *Old Pictures in Florence.*

In *Old Pictures in Florence* Browning tells us how he once wandered through the churches of the Italian city, looking at the faded pictures of the Pre-Raphaelite masters, who re-discovered the art of painting. Their names are only known to students, their works are gradually dropping to pieces, their fame is eclipsed by the splendour of later artists. In the first and second verses, the poet is looking down from a hill upon Florence:—

In the valley beneath, where white and wide
 And dashed by the morning's water-gold,
 Florence lay out on the mountain-side.
 River and bridge, and street, and square
 Lay mine, as much at my beck and call,
 Through the live translucent bath of air,
 As the sights in a magic crystal ball.

As he looks, his eyes rest on the wonderful Bell Tower,
 the Campanile, which was built by Giotto :—

And of all I saw and of all I praised,
 The most to praise and the best to see,
 Was the startling bell-tower Giotto raised :
 But why did it more than startle me ?*

That leads to the expostulation with Giotto in verse iii. This verse puzzles us at first, but the explanation is found in xxx. and xxxi. One thing he has come to see at Florence is a picture by that artist which had been greatly praised by Michael Angelo,—“a precious little thing that Buonarotto eyed like a lover ;” but with all his searchings through churches and galleries he has failed to find it. And, in a playful way, he says he could not have thought that a good friend of his like Giotto would have treated him so badly. He has, indeed, failed to find certain pictures of other artists, and has borne the disappointments ;

But the thing grows somewhat hard to bear
 When I find a Giotto join the rest.

In verse iv., he tells us how he has a gift,—“a gift God

* There is a splendid description of this Campanile in Ruskin's *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, chap. iv. § 43 ; he calls it “ the model and mirror of perfect architecture.” Delightful accounts of Giotto and the other old masters will be found in Ruskin's *Mornings in Florence*.

grants me now and then,"—of restoring the old Florence in his imagination and seeing the ancient people throng the streets. He used to linger under the olives and lean between the aloes :—

And mark through the winter afternoons,
By a gift God grants me now and then,
In the mild decline of those suns like moons,
Who walked in Florence, beside her men.

His business is not with the living, it is with the dead :—

They might chirp and chaffer, come and go
For pleasure or profit, her men alive—
My business was hardly with them, I trow,
But with empty cells of the human hive ;
—With the chapter-room, the cloister-porch,
The church's apsis, aisle or nave,
Its crypt, one fingers along with a torch,
Its face set full for the sun to shave.

He wanders through the dim aisles, looking at the decaying pictures ; and he thinks most of all about the SOULS that created them. He thinks he sees the ghosts haunting the walls, where they put their spiritual life into those sacred frescoes. It seems to him that whenever a fresco peels and drops, a touch of agony thrills through a shivering ghost ; and, as the colours fade, the spectral artist must surely feel that he is being robbed of a portion of his being. That is what most impresses Browning,—through every mouldering and neglected picture he feels the presence of "the wronged soul of an ancient master."

Wherever a fresco peels and drops,
 Wherever an outline weakens and wanes
 Till the latest life in the painting stops,
 Stands One whom each fainter pulse-tick pains!
 One, wishful each scrap should clutch the brick,
 Each tinge not wholly escape the plaster,
 —A lion who dies of an ass's kick,
 The wronged great soul of an ancient master.

That verse refers to the shameful way in which the city of Florence neglects its art treasures, and allows the sacred relics to decay. It is different with supreme artists, such as Angelo and Rafael, whose works everyone praises and thinks he understands; they have risen into the heavenly beatitude and see God face to face, and what care they about human praise or blame!

For oh, this world and the wrong it does!
 They are safe in heaven with their backs to it,
 The Michaels and Rafaels, you hum and buzz
 Round the works of, you of the little wit!
 Do their eyes contract to the earth's old scope,
 Now that they see God face to face,
 And have all attained to be poets, I hope?
 'Tis their holiday now, in any case.

Much they reckon of your praise and you!
 But the wronged great souls—can they be quit
 Of a world where their work is all to do,
 Where you style them, you of the little wit,
 Old Master This, and Early the Other,
 Not dreaming that Old and New are fellows;
 A younger succeeds to an elder brother,
 Da Vincis derive in good time from Dellos.

It is not personal ambition that makes these old masters grieve; they know their fading pictures have

a lesson to teach which the world refuses to learn. Their frescoes are fading before men have gained the revelation which they were intended to give. While Angelo and Rafael repose in celestial joy and triumph, these wronged souls cannot be at peace even in heaven while their labours are perishing on earth. It is not selfishness which moves them. They toiled without one thought of earthly reward; all they desired was to deliver their message.

In verse xi., some one is supposed to argue:—
“Well, if we could see any real meaning in their work, we should be quite ready to give them their meed of praise.”

“If you knew their work you would deal your dole.”

“Well then”—answers Browning—“let me explain the value of the work of those old masters”:—

May I take upon me to instruct you?

When we go to such a collection of paintings as that in the National Gallery, we are greatly puzzled by many pictures which are quite famous, which we feel we *ought* to admire, and yet cannot understand. These are chiefly by artists who are called Old Masters. If we had wandered with the poet through the Florentine churches, we should most likely have criticised the frescoes of which he speaks. Looking at the melancholy saints with stiff limbs and huge aureoles, the awkward Madonnas with little Saviours, in all kinds of impossible positions, on their knees, we should have said: “How poor is this kind of work compared with the classic perfection of Greece, and the wonderful breadth and richness of modern art.” But Browning sees through

the works to the workers. He maintains that here there is a revelation of spiritual power such as we never get a glimpse of in the statues and temples of Greece. What was it that Greek art did? It created forms of completed beauty and strength, beyond which nothing higher could be conceived.

When Greek Art ran and reached the goal,
 Thus much had the world to boast *in fructu*—
 The truth of man, as by God first spoken,
 Which the actual generations garble,
 Was re-uttered, and Soul (which Limbs betoken)
 And Limbs (Soul informs) made new in marble.

And what was the influence of Greek art? He tells us in verses xii., xiii., xiv. These perfect forms, instead of attracting man to them, only made him feel his inferiority, subordination and imperfection. "There is the Divine"—said Greek art—"and here is the Human; each must keep its place. You may admire these wonderful creations, you may worship them; but you must remember that you can never take your place amongst them and become Divine." In verse xii., he says that the influence of Greek art was to make man rest in an ignoble contentment with his limitations. When we regard these statues of gods and goddesses, with their awful power, piercing glance, perfect grace, and everlasting beauty, then we feel that we must be satisfied with our feeble strength, small scope, imperfect grace, and brief existence.

So, you saw yourself as you wished you were,
 As you might have been, as you cannot be;
 Earth here, rebuked by Olympus there:
 And grew content in your poor degree

With your little power, by those statues' godhead,
 And your little scope, by their eyes' full sway,
 And your little grace, by their grace embodied,
 And your little date, by their forms that stay.

In verse xiii., he uses special instances to enforce this view. However kingly you try to be, you can never sit with the royalty of a Theseus; however you endeavour after perfection, you can never reach the majesty of the son of Priam; your wrath may be tremendous, but mightier still is Apollo's rage as he slays the snake; your most awful grief can never be so grand as Niobe's; your race of life is surpassed by the game which is made immortal on the marble frieze; and in your death you must be out-shone by the dying Alexander.

You would fain be kinglier, say, than I am?
 Even so, you will not sit like Theseus.
 You would prove a model? The son of Priam
 Has yet the advantage in arms' and knees' use.
 You're wroth—can you slay your snake like Apollo?
 You're grieved—still Niobe's the grander!
 You live—there's the Racer's frieze to follow:
 You die—there's the dying Alexander.

So, testing your weakness by their strength,
 Your meagre charms by their rounded beauty,
 Measured by Art in your breadth and length,
 You learned—to submit is a mortal's duty.
 —When I say "you" 'tis the common soul,
 The collective I mean: the race of Man
 That receives life in parts to live in a whole,
 And grow here according to God's clear plan.

Then, in verses xv. to xviii., he tells us how impossible it was for man to rest in Greek art; its very finality and completeness make it inadequate to the needs of human nature.

Growth came when, looking your last on them all,
 You turned your eyes inwardly one fine day
 And cried with a start—What if we so small
 Be greater and grander the while than they!
 Are they perfect of lineament, perfect in stature?
 In both, of such lower types are we
 Precisely because of our wider nature;
 For time, 'theirs.—ours, for eternity.

To-day's brief passion limits their rage;
 It seethes with the morrow for us and more.
 They are perfect—how else? they shall never change;
 We are faulty—why not? we have time in store.
 The Artificer's hand is not arrested
 With us—we are rough-hewn, no-wise polished:
 They stand for our copy, and, once invested
 With all they can teach, we shall see them abolished.

That is what he feels in relation to Greek art,—it does not satisfy the infinite aspirations of the soul. "What's come to perfection perishes;" but man never comes to perfection, therefore he can never perish. Man's immortality is constituted by his sense of imperfection; whatever stage he gains, he still feels there are vaster heights to strive after. In verse xix., he tells us how his sense of infinite aspiration is met in the *Christian* art of these early masters.

On which I conclude, that the early painters,
 To cries of "Greek Art and what more wish you?"
 Replied, "To become now self-acquainters,
 And paint man, man, whatever the issue!
 Make new hopes shine through the flesh they fray,
 New fears aggrandise the rags and tatters:
 To bring the invisible full into play!
 Let the visible go to the dogs—what matters?"

With Christianity there came a NEW IDEAL; it told

men that they were made after the power of an endless life ; not feebleness and prostration before a completed beauty, but endeavour and aspiration into ever-widening spheres of divine perfection,—that was to be the goal of the human spirit.

Growth came, when looking your last on them all,
You turned your eyes inwardly one fine day,

And when the soul looks within, it finds itself greater and grander than the finest creations of classic art, it finds a power of endless growth, a capacity for loftier vision, an aspiration towards the infinite. The statues of Greece are complete once and for ever, they are made perfect in time ; but *we* are to grow in perfection through eternity. And these obscure early masters laboured under the impulse of this new ideal of the divineness of human nature ; it is the very grandeur of their conception which sometimes overpowers their technical skill. The halo of glory they paint in gold around the Virgin's brow is, if I may so put it, the symbol of their despair ; they seem to say, "These human forms are diviner than we can reveal, so we leave them with these rays of light to suggest the glory we have failed to express in the features." They were so blinded by excess of light, by the blaze of spiritual beauty and celestial holiness, that they overlooked the technical details of their work ; all they wanted was to make their pictures adequate to arouse emotions of rapture, worship, reverence, and devotion. That was their object,—

To bring the invisible full into play !
Let the visible go to the dogs,—what matters ?

For their faithfulness to the new ideal, Browning calls on us to render our homage:—

Give these, I exhort you, their guerdon and glory
 For daring so much, before they well did it.
 The first of the new, in our race's story,
 Beats the last of the old, 'tis no idle quiddit.
 The worthies began a revolution,
 Which if on earth you intend to acknowledge,
 Why, honour them now! (ends my allocution)
 Nor confer your degree when the folks leave college.

That, then, was the function of these well-nigh forgotten artists. They struggled to express a truth, never guessed at by the Greeks. In the progressive march of art you cannot afford to omit a single stage; in your admiration of the New, you must never disparage the Old; for without that Old you could never have had the New. We must remember

That Old and New are fellows;
 A younger succeeds to an elder brother,
 Da Vincis derive in good time from Dellos.

The Florentine painters gave a new initiative to the human spirit, which has resulted in the matchless creations of modern art; their crudeness and imperfection was inspired by a vital principle; their pictures quickened new faith in the infinite power of the soul and its endowment of eternal progress.

(ii.) **Fra Lippo Lippi.**

There is a passage in a number of the *Atlantic Monthly* which expresses most admirably the spirit of *Old Masters in Florence*.* “In the dark chapel of the

* July, 1891, “Tintoret, the Shakspeare of Painters.”

Rucellai, at the Church of Sta. Maria Novella in Florence, is a dingy altarpiece representing the Virgin and the infant Christ. Cimabue painted it; and when it was finished the Florentines made a holiday, and bore the picture through the streets amid great rejoicing, to the chapel where it now hangs. That stiff and awkward Madonna, that doll-like Christ, were hailed by them as the highest achievement of painting. For us Cimabue's masterpiece has only an historic interest,—we find no charm in its Byzantine rigidity. Yet that crude work was the seed of Italian painting, and if we follow its growth during three centuries we shall be led to the Paradise of Tintoret, in which are embodied all the excellencies and advances of the painter's art. Between that humble beginning and that glorious achievement an army of artists and myriads of paintings intervene. If we look deep enough, we shall be conscious that they were all agents whereby a mighty spirit was seeking to express itself to man,—a spirit which first appealed to human piety through the symbols of religion, and which, as its agents acquired skill and reach, bodied itself forth in higher images and conscious forms. The name of that spirit is BEAUTY, never to be found perfect in the outer world, but known as it communicates through the senses portents of itself which the soul sublimates into that ideal unity by which the laws of nature and the destiny of man are beheld in their highest aspect." Those early Masters were so absorbed by the glory of the spirit that they overlooked the claims of the flesh. And that oversight was providential; apart from that intense revelation of the soul we could never have gained the finer completeness of modern

art, wherein the spirit and the flesh blend into one perfect beauty. That was the function of the old Florentine painters,

To bring the invisible full into play !
Let the visible go to the dogs—what matters ?

But that depreciation of the visible could not become a permanent impulse. The flesh was sure, sooner or later, to claim its rights and at last to affirm itself as the medium by which alone the invisible could be brought full into play. And with all his reverence for Cimabue, Giotto and the rest, we find that Browning, with his broad sympathies, recognises the important place of the humanists of the Renaissance in the development of art. In our study of his Love Poems, we saw how he believes in the "redemption of the body," and anticipates a regenerate world when soul shall not help flesh more than flesh helps soul.

In *Fra Lippo Lippi* he describes in dramatic form the reaction against the ultra-spiritualism of the old masters, and very finely indicates how far that reaction was valid and healthy. At the commencement of this poem, some officers of Florence have arrested a suspicious-looking man going through the streets in disguise just before day-break. To their amazement they find him dressed in friar's gown and girdle ; upon which he explains himself by telling the story of his life. Though he is a friar he is a sad rogue, who has never lost his taste for fun and frolic. He is also a famous artist,—so famous that Cosimo de Medici has employed him to paint a great picture ; and, to ensure the completion of the work, his patron locked him up

in his studio to prevent him wasting his time in scandalous adventures. But through the window he saw some merry-makers going by, and in reckless eagerness he must join them at all hazards. The door was locked, but he knew a plan of escape !

Into shreds it went,
Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,
All the bed furniture—a dozen knots,
There was a ladder! down I let myself,
Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped,
And after them. I came up with the fun
Hard by Saint Lawrence, hail fellow, well met,—

And so, as I was stealing back again,
To get to bed and have a bit of sleep
Ere I rise up to-morrow and go work
On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast
With his great round stone to subdue the flesh,
You snap me off the sudden.

In the reckless worldliness of Fra Lippo Lippi Browning indicates the dangers of the reaction of the Renaissance in favour of a rehabilitation of the flesh ; but in the story of the man's life we have some splendid vindications of the rights of human nature, and of the validity of physical beauty as an element of true works of art. When he was only eight years old he had been rescued from the streets by some brethren of the Carmelite Cloister. He was so hungry that he was glad to take any vows which the monks required ; but, for all that, the associations of his vagabond life were very strong upon him. The only thing he was clever at was drawing,—but alas ! the things he drew quite shocked the holy brethren. In copy-books and missals and music

scrolls he filled the pages and margins with faces and forms and scenes taken from his recollections of the disreputable purlieus of the city where he had spent his boyhood. However, the Prior was a wise man, and thought that this smart young artist could have his talents turned into a better direction, so Lippo was set to work to cover the cloister-walls with religious pictures. But when his work was done, the figures on the walls were found *too life-like*,—they reminded the beholders too much of this world to be the means of carrying their thoughts to heaven. The Prior “stopped all that in no time”; and, in the very spirit of medieval pietism, spoke his objection to these realistic paintings:—

How! what's here?

Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all!
 Faces, arms, legs and bodies like the true
 As much as pea and pea! it's devil's game!
 Your business is not to catch men with show,
 With homage to the perishable clay,
 But lift them over it, ignore it all,
 Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh.

But Fra Lippo cannot agree with this doctrine; he cannot think that even to honour the spirit there is any need to fray the flesh and reduce it to rags and tatters.

Now, is this sense, I ask?

A fine way to paint soul, by painting body
 So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further
 And can't fare worse!

For instance, if he wishes to express the spiritual emotions of hope, fear, sorrow or joy in the face of

some saint, will they be disguised by the beauty which shines from the features and expression ?

Won't beauty go with these ?
 Suppose I've made her eyes all right and blue,
 Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,
 And then add soul and heighten them threefold ?

And then, in the very spirit of the Renaissance, he makes a bold claim for the validity of beauty for its own sake ; he will not ask what use it is, in what services of pietism it can be employed ; for its own sake it is precious,—precious as a revelation of something that God himself loves, of a living element woven into the fabric of the visible world :—

Or say there's beauty with no soul at all—
 (I never saw it—put the case the same—)
 If you get simple beauty and naught else,
 You get about the best thing God invents :
 That's somewhat: and you'll find the soul you have missed,
 Within yourself, when you return him thanks.*

* In the same spirit, Emerson wrote:—

In May, when sea-winds pierced our solitudes,
 I found the fresh Rhodora in the woods,
 Spreading its leafless blooms in a damp nook,
 To please the desert and the sluggish brook.
 The purple petals, fallen in the pool,
 Made the black water with their beauty gay ;
 Here might the red-bird come his plumes to cool,
 And court the flower that cheapens his array.
 Rhodora ! if the sages ask thee why
 This charm is wasted on the earth and sky,
 Tell them, dear, that if eyes were made for seeing,
 Then Beauty is its own excuse for being :
 Why thou wert there, O rival of the rose !
 I never thought to ask, I never knew :
 But, in my simple ignorance, suppose
 The self-same Power that brought me there brought you.

That is, really, a splendid vindication of Beauty as a final end, as a direct revelation of the thought of God; as our mind apprehends divine knowledge and power in the might and majesty of nature, so the soul reaches a secret of divine grace and love in the apparition of Beauty. As Oliver Wendell Holmes puts it, "Beauty is Divinity taking outlines and colour."

But the Painter could not make the Carmelites understand such "secular" views as these; so he left the Cloister, and, after many adventures, settled down with his patron, Cosimo de Medici. But though he tries to be faithful to his own broader conceptions of art, yet he cannot shake off altogether the influences of the Cloister,—just as, for some time, the early humanists were fettered by the traditions of Medievalism:—

And yet the old schooling sticks, the old grave eyes
Are peeping o'er my shoulder as I work,
The heads shake still—"It's Art's decline, my son!
You're not of the true painters, great and old."

So, sometimes, when they bid him follow Cimabue and Giotto and Angelico, he really tries to do so; but, every now and then, as he is working at his saints, the blood runs warm within his veins, he feels that

The world and life's too big to pass for a dream,

and, in the reaction of the strain he has put upon himself, he does "these wild things in sheer despite," and plays such fooleries as they have caught him at. They must be patient with him; he cannot shake off his old love of the world and his enjoyment of this life:—

My lesson learned,
The value and significance of flesh,
I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards.

Then he goes on to prophesy of a day when men will rejoice and be glad in this natural world for the sake of its charm and beauty. He knows, "as certainly as that the morning-star's about to shine, what will hap some day." Already he has a disciple who lingers about the convent, a young painter who studies every line of his master's work, and those who live long enough will see the revolution this Guidi will bring about. In this new revival of Art men will see the world anew, they will behold in it an apparition of the Spirit of Beauty; they will marvel at

The beauty and the wonder and power,
The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
Changes, surprises,—and God made it all!

Fra Lippo gives us one very fine vindication of art as the interpretation of nature. Some one objects that if the world is beautiful, there is no need for art to reproduce its scenes on canvas; what advantage is there in turning from a landscape to look upon its copy in the picture? Don't raise such an objection as that, he answers, a true painting is not a mere copy, it is a vital creation, revealing to your inward vision some loveliness which the outward eye has never seen. Everybody, even dumb animals, can *look at* the world, it is art alone can teach us to *see into* nature.

For, don't you mark? we're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;

And so they are better, painted—better to us,
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;
God uses us to help each other so,
Leading our minds out.

That view of art as revelation makes him realise the religious function of this so-called “profane” tendency of recent painting; why, he says, if he could be true to his own principles he would become a preacher or a priest, “take the Prior’s pulpit-place, interpret God to all of you.” How he grieves that he must die, before these principles of a natural and human art prevail:—

Oh, oh,
It makes me mad to see what men shall do
And we in our graves! This world’s no blot for us
Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good:
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.

We will leave him with these fervent words upon his glowing lips, and need not follow the frolicsome old fellow as he chaffs the officers and persuades them to let him go. As the morning dawns, he scampers off to his chamber at Cosimo’s house to set to work again on the emaciated form of Saint Jerome, tormenting his flesh to save his soul.

(iii.) **Andrea Del Sarto.**

As a contrast to *Old Masters in Florence*, Browning gives us an account of the work of a later artist, called Andrea Del Sarto, “the faultless painter.” This poem is a monologue addressed to his wife, in which he tells the story of the failure of his career. As far as technical

skill is concerned, Andrea's pictures are perfect in drawing, colouring, grouping, light, and shade; all these elements are executed with consummate ability. And yet, with all their cleverness, they never satisfy you; you admire them, but you do not love them. He possesses his art, his art never takes possession of him. The chief value of a great painting is its *suggestiveness*, it implies more than it shows. How universal is the application of that saying: "There is something better than to speak the best, it is to feel that the BEST must always remain untold." Now, in Andrea's art, you feel that he has told everything he has got to reveal, you are never moved by any mystic touch of wonder and reverence. Joshua Reynolds was once looking at a painting which had been highly praised; "Yes," he said, "it is clever, but it wants,—it wants," and then snapping his fingers he cried impatiently, "it wants *that*!" And Andrea's pictures want *that*, that inexplicable element of force and depth, power and inevitability, without which the most skilful manipulation is a failure.

In this poem we find him bitterly conscious of his defects. When he compares his work with that of other painters, he knows that he can, indeed, do things impossible to them; but in contrast with them he feels himself to be only a craftsman. In their effort to express the divine inspiration which burns within their souls, he recognises a power to which he can never attain.

There burns a truer light of God in them,
In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,
Heart, or whate'er else, than goes to prompt
This low-pulsed forthright craftman's hand of mine.

Then he looks at a picture of Rafael's, and he criticises it. "Look at that," he says, "the lines are quite at fault; and see, what an arm, all wrongly put! Why I could correct these faults quite easily; I can draw more accurately than Rafael." But, for all this, he knows that for him to paint such a picture is impossible. The body of the painting may be at fault, but the soul is right; all the play, the insight, the stretch of the inspired work,—these are for ever beyond the utmost of his power.

That arm is wrongly put—and there again—
A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,
Its body, so to speak: its soul is right,
He means right—that, a child may understand.
Still, what an arm! and I could alter it:
But all the play, the insight and the stretch—
Out of me, out of me! And wherefore out?
Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,
We might have risen to Rafael, I and you.

He tries to think that if his wife had been different, he might have done nobler work. We notice how Browning creates Lucrezia for us by the way in which the artist talks to her and about her. She never speaks a word, and yet we know her quite as well as we know her husband, to whose confessions we are listening. His wife is superbly beautiful, but shallow, selfish, sensuous. She is an incorrigible flirt, and in his infatuation Andrea tries to be resigned to her infidelity. She only cares for his art because it brings the money to provide her with dresses and jewels and amusements. He thinks it is the influence of this woman which has kept him from mounting to the heights attained by Angelo and Rafael.

But had you—oh, with the same perfect brow,
 And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,
 And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird
 The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare—
 Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind!
 Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged
 "God and the glory! never care for gain.
 The Present by the Future, what is that?
 Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo—
 Rafael is waiting: up to God all three!"
 I might have done it for you.

Then, in a moment, he despises himself for such a suggestion:—

Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.
 Besides, incentives come from the soul's self;
 The rest avail not. Why do I need you?
 What wife had Rafael, or has Agnolo?

Those words, *All is as God over-rules*, are not an expression of pious trust in the divine will, they tell us rather of ignoble resignation to limitations which an earnest man would have striven to transcend. Without the inward incentive, no change in outward circumstances could have availed him; it is the narrowness of his own nature that will not allow him to expand into the ampler life of vital and creative art. Doting upon a false woman's superficial beauty, he shows himself too effortless ever to be roused by any impulse from without. There was a flabbiness in Andrea's moral nature which forbade any noble achievement in art. When he went to France to serve the king, he allowed himself to be enticed home again, just as an honourable career seemed to be opening. He has broken his promise to return to

his royal patron; and has even used the money, entrusted to him for the purchase of works of art, to decorate his own home. And yet he talks about his fraud in fatalistic lethargy as a kind of inevitable misfortune.

God is just.

King Francis may forgive me : oft at nights
When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,
The walls become illumined, brick from brick
Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,
That gold of his I did cement them with !

The misery of Andrea is that of a man who has seen the heavenly vision and proved disobedient, who has recognised an Ideal which he fails to worship; and his deepest wretchedness arises from a fruitless effort to be resigned to his shortcomings. In the imperfection of the Old Masters there was the promise and potency of diviner things. In the faultlessness of Andrea Del Sarto there is nothing to move the soul, rouse the imagination, or inspire the heart. Failure may be glorious, when aspiration is infinite; success is fatal, when there is no impulse to rise above the limitation of sense into the freedom of the spirit.

3.—MUSIC.

(i.)—A Toccata of Galuppi's.

Browning has three poems on music which may be called his Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso. He seems to believe that, more than any other art, music is able to sound the diapason of human nature from deepest depths to loftiest heights. More than either painting or

poetry, he thinks music expresses directly the very soul of the artist, and so appeals immediately to the souls of men. His *Inferno* is contained in *A Toccata of Galuppi's*. Galuppi Baldassoro was born in Italy in 1706; he was a versatile composer, but I understand that his works have now only a technical interest for students. In this poem an Englishman is listening to a light piece of Galuppi's music; he is a man who believes life to be a serious business, and this sprightly, flippant toccata raises in his mind many strange emotions. He is interested in art, not only for its own sake, but also as the revelation of the artist's soul. Pondering this toccata, you find that he regards it as the revelation of lack of soul,—that is exactly the impression it makes upon his mind,—*there is no soul in it*. Its cold, superficial, cricket-like chirping only suggests how the soul can die out of a man, until he has only a name that he lives, while his nobler being is dead. He has never been in Venice; but, listening to this music, it seems as though it re-created the old Venetian society that took such delight in it. He says he is sorry to give such an interpretation of the musician's work, but it would prove him to be deaf and blind if he did not feel the worthlessness of his compositions.

Oh Galuppi, Baldassoro, this is very sad to find!
I can hardly misconceive you; it would prove me deaf and blind;
But although I take your meaning, 'tis with such a heavy mind!

Here you come with your old music, and here's all the good it brings.

What, they lived once thus at Venice where the merchants were the kings,

Where St. Mark's is, where the Doges used to wed the sea with rings?

Ay, because the sea's the street there; and 'tis arched by . . .
what you call
. . . Shylock's bridge with houses on it, where they kept the
carnival:
I was never out of England—its as if I saw it all.

As still he listens, he not only sees Venice, there also appears an Italian ball-room, bright and beautiful, ringing with Galuppi's music and laden with perfume. Verses iv. and v. describe the ball-room; verses vi. to ix. describe the influence of the toccata on the dancers. The room is crowded with bright men and beautiful women, whose shallow life this toccata exactly represents. Amidst pauses in the kissing and dancing and flirting, the music seems to ask such questions as prompt the minds of the gilded water-flies. "Are you happy?" "Yes!" "Then kiss me,—and yet more kisses, before again we fling ourselves into the whirl of the giddy dance." Or, if some strain in the toccata suggests the horrid thought, "Must we die?" the ugly question is only like an olive at the feast, which whets the jaded appetite for a yet more sparkling wine. The thought of death only reminds them how they must pack the brief remainder of their life with pleasure. "Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die." In verse x. that coruscating scene of ephemeral pleasure fades away, those bright, careless men and women are gone.

Some with lives that came to nothing, some with deeds as well
undone,
Death stepped tacitly and took them where they never see
the sun.

And it is hard to believe that of all those superficial,

giddy, sensual people there is any soul that remains immortal.

Now we come to the transition in the poem. The man who has this vision is a high-principled, earnest thinker, who takes a very lofty estimate of human life, its purpose and destiny. This ephemeral music of Galuppi's cannot, indeed, shake his faith; but it makes him feel uncomfortable; it makes him run cold to think that men and women should seem so void of spirituality as to spend their lives like that. When graver thoughts occupy his mind, there sometimes comes the echo of that cold, creeping music.

But when I sit down to reason, think to take my stand nor
swerve,

While I triumph o'er a secret wrung from nature's close reserve,
In you come with your cold music, till I creep through every
nerve.

Yes, you, like a ghostly cricket, creaking where a house was
burned.

Then he tells us what the music says to him:—

"Dust and ashes, dead and done with, Venice spent what Venice
earned.

"The soul, doubtless, is immortal—where a soul can be dis-
cerned."

That is the dirge over the graves of the pleasure-seekers. In verse xiii. Galuppi seems to speak satirically to his critic. "Of course," he says, "you are ever so much better than these ephemeral creatures; you are not a butterfly of pleasure; you have a soul, able to explore nature and study science. Without doubt, you think you have a soul that can be discerned."

"Yours for instance: you know physics, something of geology,
 "Mathematics are your pastime; souls shall rise in their degree;
 "Butterflies may dread extinction,—you'll not die, it cannot be!
 "As for Venice and her people, merely born to bloom and drop,
 "Here on earth they bore their fruitage, mirth and folly were
 the crop:
 "What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to stop?
 "Dust and ashes!"

At last, this ironical banter becomes intolerable to the listener. While he must confess their worthless lives, yet he cannot ponder complacently the fate of those vanished Venetians. The man's soul goes out in sympathy to them, and their fate seems to cast a withering shadow on his own immortal hope; can he find it in his heart to pass judgment on them, or to claim for himself a destiny he must deny to them?

"Dust and ashes!" So you creak it, and I want the heart to scold.
 Dear dead women, with such hair, too—what's become of all the gold
 Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly and grown old.

As Dante wept over the sufferings of the lost in Hell, even while he confessed the justice of their doom, so the speaker in this poem cannot cut himself off from sympathy with even the most worthless of his fellow-creatures; the thought that they have passed away like shadows makes him shiver as with a blank sense of his own annihilation:—"I feel chilly and grown old." That is the Inferno of music; and when we travel down into it, we feel a cold shadow of doubt strike through our faith in the greatness and the destiny of human life.

In the two following poems we shall see how faith rallies itself in the struggle with doubt, and mounts on eagle's wings into the light of God.

(ii.) **Master Hugues of Saxe Gotha.**

In *Master Hugues of Saxe Gotha* we have the Purgatorio of Music. An organist is playing a fugue in a cathedral after the congregation is gone, while the sexton is putting out the candles. He fancies the composer is by his side, and he wants to learn the meaning of such strange music as this. What is such music good for? In this "mountainous fugue," out of one or two simple themes (echoed and re-echoed, until the re-duplicating echoes seem to be chasing one another through the vaulted roof), there is gradually built up a labyrinthine cathedral of sound. But in all this there seems to be no purpose, no one dominant emotion, no definite aim; it is curious, puzzling, intricate; it is not vital and inspiring. In verses i.-xi., he supposes himself expostulating with the ghost of Master Hugues, begging him to explain the meaning of his twelfth most complicated fugue. In verses xii.-xxi., we have an extraordinary description of the composition, which only those familiar with that kind of music will be able to follow. In verse xxii., the organist begins to see the meaning after which he has been groping. He thinks human life is like a fugue,—an intricate web woven out of a few simple threads of birth, love, joy, sorrow, hope and fear. The threads of life combine, twist and interlace through the changes of the years, until, in a moment, the

crashing fugue sinks into silence, and life is swallowed up by death.

XXII.

Is it your moral of life ?

Such a web, simple and subtle,
Weave we on earth here in impotent strife,
Backward and forward each throwing his shuttle,
Death ending all with a knife ?

XXIII.

Over our heads truth and nature—

Still our life's zigzags and dodges,
Ins and outs, weaving a new legislature—
God's gold just shining its last where that lodges,
Palled beneath man's usurpature.

In xix. and xx., he has been comparing the complication of the fugue to the spider-webs hanging from the church roof. The re-iterating complication of the piece seems to hide the real music, just as the webs darken the carvings and the gold. So, he thinks, our zigzags and dodges, our follies, fears and fashions make life such a different thing from what God intended. Instead of obeying the divine laws, we weave a new legislature of convention and opinion, until God's gold is scarcely able to shine through the usurpature of human cobwebs.

XXIV.

So we o'ershroud stars and roses,
Cherub and trophy and garland ;
Nothings grow something which quickly closes
Heaven's earnest eye : not a glimpse of the far land
Gets through our comments and glozes.

XXV.

Ah, but traditions, inventions,
(Say we and make up a visage)

So many men with such various intentions,
Down the past ages, must know more than this age!
Leave we the web its dimensions !

That is, men will not open their eyes to see truth and nature for themselves, because of their blind veneration of authority. There is the Vision waiting for them, but they blindfold their eyes with old opinions; they say, "The wise men of the past must know better than we;" traditions and inventions take the place of active thought and clear-eyed vision, and so

Leave we the web its dimensions.

From this point of view, life appears so aimless and meaningless, that he does not wonder men mistake the tangled web for the solid reality, and regard fancies, fashions, inventions and traditions as the important facts.

That is the Purgatorio of doubt. To this man life in the ball-room at Venice would be utterly intolerable; and yet he fails to gain a clear insight into the diviner meaning of a world like this. To the pleasure-seeking Venetians, life was as superficial as a toccata of Galuppi's; to this thoughtful organist, life was as perplexing and inexplicable as a fugue of Master Hugues of Saxe Gotha. He thinks, however, that before he leaves the organ, he will show that music can make a fuller revelation of truth and nature.

XXVII.

Yet all the while a misgiving will linger,
Truth's golden o'er us although we refuse it—
Nature, through cobwebs we string her.

will try to reach a finer region of harmony by playing a composition by Palestrina to the full swell of the organ.

XXVIII.

Say the word, straight I unstop the full organ,
Blaze out the *mode Palestrina*.

At just at that moment, the candle gutters in its socket, and he hears the sacristan closing the doors :—

XXIX.

——— Lo you, the wick in the socket !
Hollo, you sacristan, show us a light there !
Down it dips, gone like a rocket.

The cathedral is in darkness, the steps are rotten, and if he does not take care, his dead body will be found in the morning at the bottom.

What, you want, do you, to come unawares,
Sweeping the church up for first morning prayers,
And find a poor devil has ended his cares
At the foot of your rotten-runged rat-riddled stairs ?
Do I carry the moon in my pocket ?

Here we have life presented as a labyrinthine puzzle, "mountainous fugue," whose re-duplicating echoes of earthly cares, opinions and traditions drown the celestial harmony; and as the musician is about to soar into the empyrean beyond the noises and shadows of cobwebs, his light goes out, and he nearly breaks his neck down the rotten staircase. In this poem we are, indeed, far beyond the sensualism of the *Inferno*, but as yet we are only in Purgatory; the light of the distant Heaven lures us onward, but our upward path is doubtful, dark and labyrinthine.

(iii.) *Abt Vogler.*

Emancipation from the enthrallment of time into the freedom of eternity is described in the wonderful poem *Abt Vogler*. Abt Vogler was born at Würzburg in 1749, and died in 1814. He invented an instrument called the orchestrion, and on this he had a fine genius for extemporising. Browning describes him as revealing the supreme power of music to transfigure the soul into spiritual vision. This is the Paradiso of music. In this poem we have one of the loftiest flights of Browning's muse, bearing us into a transcendent heaven of beatitude.

The musician is extemporising on his orchestrion, and he has surprised himself by a burst of magnificent music, grander than anything he has hitherto produced; and as his fingers cease to move over the keys, he is possessed by an overmastering desire that the sounds might become crystallised into visible beauty, and so embody forever his rapturous emotions. In the first verse he recalls the rabbinical legend, which tells that King Solomon was a potent magician, who, by speaking the Ineffable Name inscribed upon his ring, was at once able to summon creatures from air and earth and sea, from the heights of heaven and the depths of hell, to build a splendid palace for the princess he loved. Well! by the magic of music, Abt Vogler has built a wonderful palace of sound; but unlike Solomon's it has dissolved; when he takes his fingers off the keys, the strain of harmony is lost, never to be recovered. The notes have been to him what the living creatures were to Solomon, in obedience

to his will sweeping down to the roots of the world,
plunging even into hell, and then mounting in one
living crowd into the glory of heaven.

II.

Would it might tarry like his, the beautiful building of mine,
This which my keys in a crowd pressed and importuned to raise!
Ah, one and all, how they helped, would dispart now and now
combine,
Zealous to hasten the work, heighten their master his praise!
And one would bury his brow with a wild plunge down to hell,
Burrow awhile and build, broad on the roots of things,
Then up again swim into sight, having based me my palace
well,
Founded it, fearless of flame, flat on the nether springs.

III.

And another would mount and march, like the excellent minion
he was,
Ay, and another and yet another, one crowd but with many a
crest,
Raising my rampired walls of gold as transparent as glass,
Eager to do and die, yield each his place to the rest:
For higher still and higher (as a runner tips with fire,
When a great illumination surprises a festal night—
Outlining round and round Rome's dome from space to spire)
Up, the pinnaced glory reached, and the pride of my soul was
in sight.

He had never felt anything like it before! It seemed
as though the divine forces of the universe were
gathering to help and inspire him. He tells us how
he feels that not only is he trying to mount to heaven,
all nature at the same time conspires with his ad-
venturous flight; yea, heaven yearns down to reach
earth and respond to this passion to scale the sky.
At the close of verse iii. the pride of his soul was

in sight, but now he burst into a more rapturous strain :—

IV.

In sight? Not half! for it seemed, it was certain, to match
 man's birth,
 Nature in turn conceived, obeying an impulse as I;
 And the emulous heaven yearned down, made effort to reach the
 earth,
 As the earth had done her best, in my passion, to scale the
 sky;
 Novel splendours burst forth, grew familiar and dwelt with mine,
 Not a point nor peak but found, but fixed its wandering star;
 Meteor-moons, balls of blaze: and they did not pale nor pine,
 For earth had attained to heaven, there was no more near nor
 far.

Space was abolished; past and future became one
 absolute present; having risen into the Divine Idea of
 Creation, he seemed to possess the omniscience of a
 god; in that exalted state of mind all things contributed
 to his ecstasy; the future gave up its creatures yet
 unborn, while the wonderful dead rose to re-visit their
 former abode.

Nay more; for there wanted not who walked in the glare and
 the glow,
 Presences plain in the place; or fresh from the Protoplast,
 Furnished for ages to come, when a kindlier wind should blow,
 Lured now to begin and live, in a house to their liking at last;
 Or else the wonderful Dead who have passed through the body
 and gone,
 But were back once more to breathe in an old world worth their
 new:
 What never had been, was now; what was, as it shall be anon;
 And what is,—shall I say, matched both? for I was made
 perfect too.

In verse vi., he contrasts music with painting and poetry, and thinks it the most miraculous of the three arts. In painting and poetry, we can trace cause and effect, the method is plain, there are certain laws to be obeyed, and in that obedience the picture is painted and the poem is written. But not even the musician himself can explain how his effects are produced, how the temple of music is built without hands.

VII.

But here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,
Existent behind all laws : that made them, and, lo, they are !
And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man,
That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a
star.

Consider it well : each tone of the scale in itself is nought ;
It is everywhere in the world—loud, soft, and all is said :
Give it to me to use ! I mix it with two in my thought,
And, there ! Ye have heard and seen : consider and bow the
head !

And now, it is gone—that palace of music ; and not by
all his efforts can he recall that miraculous strain.
Many other compositions he may create as good or even
better ; but that one unique, rapturous moment is
passed never to return.

VIII.

Well, it is gone at last, the palace of music I reared ;
Gone ! and the good tears start, the praises that came too slow ;
For one is assured at first, one scarce can say that he feared,
That he ever gave it a thought, the gone thing was to go.
Never to be again ! But many more of the kind
As good, nay, better perchance : is this your comfort to me ?
To me, who must be saved because I cling with my mind
To the same, same self, same love, same God : ay, what was,
shall be.

That is what, at first, perplexes him. Browning expresses the same spiritual trouble in *James Lee's Wife*:

Nothing can be as it has been before ;
Better, so call it, only not the same.

That music was part of the musician's self ; and now it is gone, seemingly for ever, the most precious things vanish, death and change rule the world. To rise so high into the heaven of vision, and then to drop down to earth and find life swallowed up in trivial and paltry cares,—this is intolerable, incredible ! Then he rises into a sublime act of faith ; he turns to God the Eternal Goodness, the Infinite Love, the Supreme Beauty, and affirms the immortality of all things that share one spark of divine life.

IX.

Therefore to whom turn I but to Thee, the ineffable Name ?
Builder and maker, thou, of houses not made with hands ;
What, have fear of change from thee who art ever the same ?
Doubt that thy power can fill the heart that thy power expands ?
There shall never be one lost good ! what was, shall live as
before ;
The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound ;
What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more ;
On the earth the broken arcs ; in the heaven, a perfect round.

X.

All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist ;
Not its semblance, but itself ; no beauty, nor good, nor power
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist,
When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.
The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard ;
Enough that he heard it once : we shall hear it by-and-by.

XI.

And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence
For the fulness of the days? Have we withered or agonised?
Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing might issue
thence?

Why rushed the discords in, but that harmony should be prized?
Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear,
Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the weal and woe:
But God has a few of us whom he whispers in the ear;
The rest may reason and welcome; 'tis we musicians know.

After that act of faith, he is able to reconcile himself,
for a time, to the conditions of earth. Remembering
what he has seen and heard in that moment of ecstasy,
he will now softly subdue his music to the common
chord of earth, what he calls the C Major of this
life, and then after this unwonted glow of excitement
he may get some quiet sleep.

XII.

Well it is earth with me; silence resumes her reign:
I will be patient and proud, and soberly acquiesce.
Give me the keys. I feel for the common chord again,
Sliding by semitones, till I sink to the minor,—yes
And I blunt it into a ninth, and I stand on alien ground,
Surveying awhile the heights I rolled from into the deep:
Which, hark, I have dared and done, for my resting-place is
found,
The C Major of this life: so, now I will try to sleep.

Abt Vogler reaches a solution of the world's problem
by a direct experience and immediate intuition of the
divine purpose resolving the discords of time into the
harmonies of eternity. It is Browning's conviction that
music, in its noblest functions, is the interpreter of

God's secret. Music is the angel in whose strength man is able to trample on the Inferno of sense, rise hopefully through the Purgatorio of doubt, and ascend into the Paradiso of ineffable beatitude.

CHAPTER VI.

DRAMATIC POEMS.

No great event to call out art! Is not humanity always a
great event? *George Howland.*

I.—Pippa Passes.

“**P**IPPA PASSES” may be called a dramatic poem rather than a drama; the scenes are linked together by the songs of Pippa. In every scene we have a distinguishing characteristic of Browning’s genius,—his skill in delineating a crisis which develops the essential characters of men and women. The word crisis means a *judgment*; and it is in that sense that Browning introduces the supreme moment, when the books are opened, and an inevitable sentence is pronounced. The singular attraction of this poem is the way in which four crises are precipitated by the singing of the little factory girl of Asolo.

I.

In the commencement of the poem Pippa springs out of bed, remembers it is her one holiday of all the year, and her heart bubbles over with happi-

ness. She is attracted to her window, to watch the gorgeous sunrise, as "day boils at last; boils, pure gold, o'er the cloud-cup's brim." Then she talks about how she must not waste a single moment of her one precious holiday. Very beautiful is her chatter to the sunbeam which flashes and is broken in the water of her jug, and then darts up to be re-united on the ceiling. Then she turns to the flowers in her window, and says they should be grateful for all the care she gives them, and feels quite thankful that she can rule over them as their queen. She laughs merrily at the fun of calling herself a queen, but to-day she will please herself and take any name she likes. Yes! she goes on to say, you can worship me as a queen, for, on this holiday, I am no longer the factory girl, I can be just any person I choose to imagine myself. Who shall she be? Well, there are four persons in Asolo whom she counts happiest. First, she will be that beautiful lady Ottima, wife of the old man who owns the silk factory. Yes! she will be Ottima in the lovely house and garden, where her lover Sebald comes to court her, while the old husband lies asleep. Ah! but she remembers that such a love cannot be right, even her childish instinct can feel that; the ugly gossip about the fine lady makes her shrink even from her splendour and beauty. Some better love shall be hers. She will be the bride Phene, who, at noon to-day, is to be married to that clever sculptor Jules. Then, in a moment, the simple child thinks there is a finer love than that of bride and bridegroom. She has seen a lady walking every day with her son Luigi towards a ruined tower; and it

is touching to mark their tenderness to each other. She will be Luigi, encompassed by a love which has lapped round her from her birth and can never change.

Lovers grow cold, men learn to hate their wives,
And only parents' love can last our lives.

So she rises from the unhallowed love of Sebald and Ottima, to the wedded love of Jules and Phene, to the love of Luigi's mother for her only son. That seems the highest form of *human* love. But above all there is the *divine* love; can she rise to that? Remembering that she has never known her father and mother, she rejoices to think there is a supreme beatitude, the love of God. She will imagine herself to be the good Bishop, who has just arrived at Asolo to attend the funeral of his brother who has suddenly died. Yes! she will fancy herself that holy and beloved Priest, who surely knows most of the mystery of God's great love. And, suddenly, a sublime thought flashes upon her, as she remembers her New Year's Hymn. Why should she wish to be the Bishop, when her hymn teaches that everyone can be a priest of God if divine love inspires the soul? Love is the one solemn sacrament, which ordains even the obscurest child to a priesthood of holy service. She thought it was necessary to become a bishop to realise the divine grace; but now she trembles with a more solemn feeling:—

Now wait!—Even I already seem to share
In God's love: What does New Year's Hymn declare?
What other meaning do these verses bear?

" All service ranks the same with God :
 If now, as formerly He trod
 Paradise, His presence fills
 Our earth, each only as God wills
 Can work—God's puppets, best and worst,
 Are we ; there is no last nor first.

" Say not ' a small event ! ' Why ' small ' ?
 Costs it more pain that this, ye call
 A ' great event,' should come to pass,
 Than that ? Untwine me from the mass
 Of deeds which make up life, one deed
 Power shall fall short in, or exceed ! "

And more of it, and more of it !—oh yes—
 I will pass by, and see their happiness,
 And envy none—being just as great, no doubt,
 Useful to men, and dear to God, as they !
 A pretty thing to care about
 So mightily, this single holiday !

But let the sun shine ! wherefore repine ?
 —With thee to lead me, O Day of mine,
 Down the grass-path grey with dew,
 Under the pine-wood, blind with boughs,
 Where the swallow never flew
 As yet, nor cicala dared carouse—
 Dared carouse !

Then Pippa passes through the town and country,—
 passes by each of these people whom she has counted
 the happiest in Asolo.

II.

In the early morning, Ottima is alone with her lover
 Sebald. In the madness of passion, they have murdered
 old Luca ; and now they are watching the dawning of
 the day when they must face the consequences of their

ime. Sebald is horrified at the frightful deed he has committed; he cannot rid his sight of the old man's corpse lying at the foot of the couch where he was murdered. But Ottima glories in their guilt, and declares she loves Sebald best of all for the crime which has broken her hateful marriage. To try to relieve his mind of its burden she reminds him of their days of passionate love. In one wonderful passage, she recalls day they spent, one hot July, in the thick forest:—

Buried in woods we lay, you recollect;
Swift ran the searching tempest overhead;
And ever and anon some bright white shaft
Burnt through the pine-tree roof, here burnt and there,
As if God's messenger through the close wood screen
Plunged and replunged his weapon at a venture,
Feeling for guilty thee and me: then broke
The thunder like a whole sea overhead.

Recalling those passionate hours, Ottima sweeps away all compunction from the conscience of her lover, and she becomes absorbed in her luxuriant beauty. They are beginning to glory in their sin, to feel a kind of grateful gratitude, because their love was equal to such crime. He is binding her hair in coils round her head:—

SEBALD. I kiss you now, dear Ottima, now, and now!
This way? Will you forgive me—be once more
My great Queen?

OTTIMA. Bind it thrice about my brow;
Crown me your Queen, your spirit's arbitress,
Magnificent in sin. Say that!

SEBALD. I crown you
My great white queen, my spirit's arbitress,
Magnificent——

And just as he is uttering the blasphemy, Pippa passes,
her song floating through the open window :

The year's at the spring,
The day's at the morn ;
Morning's at seven ;
The hill-side's dew-pearled ;
The lark's on the wing ;
The snail's on the thorn ;
God's in His heaven—
All's right with the world !

Sebald turns with a look of horror to Ottima :

God's in his heaven ! Do you hear that ?

Instantly, his crime looks hideous ; his love for this woman is horrible ; she herself is hateful to his sight. There is wonderful dramatic power in the following passages, where Sebald pours out his feelings of horror, without directly addressing Ottima ; while she, amazed at the sudden revulsion, entreats him not to talk about her, but to speak directly to her :—

Speak to me—speak not of me.

But Sebald takes no notice of anything she says ; he has renounced her for ever ; and, whatever punishment may overtake him, he will welcome it, now that he sees and feels the hatefulness of his sin :—

That little peasant's voice
Has righted all again. Though I be lost,
I know which is the better, never fear,
Of vice or virtue, purity or lust,
Nature or trick ! I see what I have done,
Entirely now ! Oh, I am proud to feel
Such torments—let the world take credit thence—
I, having done my deed, pay too its price !
I hate, hate—curse you ! God's in His heaven !

This tremendous revulsion overwhelms Ottima ; we are made to feel that some better impulse, even in her guilty nature, is roused by this swift stroke of judgment. These two souls, that would otherwise have gone on in sin until they plunged each other into hell, seem now to have a possibility of salvation. Ottima declares she will die with Sebald ; in her closing words she strips her soul of selfish passion, and though she be lost herself prays that her lover may find mercy :—

Not to *me*, God—to *him* be merciful !

While this tragedy is being enacted, unconscious of the judgment in which she has had such a vital part, Pippa passes on her way.

III.

In the second section of the poem, we are introduced to the house of Jules, a young sculptor, who has just brought his bride home from church. A number of art students have played him a shameful trick ; by means of forged letters he has been persuaded that a young lady so admires his sculpture that she has fallen in love with him. Jules' passion is kindled by these fervent epistles, and he consents to marry the lady without even having seen her. Now that he brings her home, he discovers that his wife is, indeed, most beautiful, but that she is an ignorant, base-born peasant girl, who has been lent out, at so much a day, as a model to the painters of the town ; and already he hears the loud laughter of the students underneath his window, mocking him for the successful cheat.

When first Phene undertook to be a partner in the trick, the young child scarcely understood what she was doing; she merely obeyed her foster-mother old Natalia, and did as she was told. But when Jules leads her into his study, and pours out all the passion of his heart, she begins to see what a serious matter this is. The sculptor at first wonders why his beautiful bride is so silent; he still believes her to be a high-born cultured lady, and he longs to hear her speak. The crisis approaches with that marvellous passage, where Jules describes, how, to his æsthetic intuition, all the forms of nature seem prophetic of the perfect human form; and how the marble, under his chisel, becomes plastic to the living ideal which seems to lurk within the stone. The passage begins with the words, "Gaze like my very life's stuff," and closes with "Flushes and glowings radiate and hover about its track." Phene listens; and, though she cannot understand the meaning of the inspired words, she feels their power and grandeur. A new soul seems born within her; to dwell always with this sublime man would be translation into a finer world. In the following words it is as though Galatea were offering worship to her creator Pygmalion:—

You creature with the eyes!
If I could look for ever up to them,
As now you let me,—I believe, all sin,
All memory of wrong done or suffering borne,
Would drop down, lower and lower, to the earth
Whence all that's low comes, and there touch and stay
—Never to overtake the rest of me,
All that, unspotted, reaches up to you,

Drawn by those eyes ! What rises is myself,
Not so the shame and suffering ; but they sink,
Are left, I rise above them. Keep me so,
Above the world !

But the terrible confession must be made ; the bridegroom learns that he has been tricked into marrying a base-born girl, one of the students' favourite models. In fierce indignation, Jules vows vengeance upon his enemies ; he gives Phene gold, they must separate, he will never see her face again,—when, all at once, Pippa's song comes floating to his ears, telling the story of the Page, who loved the Queen, and longed to be able to do some great task to prove his devotion. In this song, the Queen sits at a window, while her maid dresses her hair ; a young page below is singing :—

Give her but the least excuse to love me !
When—where—
How—can this arm establish her above me,
If fortune fixed her as my lady there,
There already, to eternally reprove me ?
(" Hist " said Kate the queen ;
But " Oh "—cried the maiden binding her tresses,
" 'Tis only a page that carols unseen
" Crumbling your hounds their messes ! ")

Is she wronged ?—to the rescue of her honour,
My heart !
Is she poor ?—What costs it to be styled a donor ?
Merely an earth's to cleave, a sea's to part !
But that fortune should have thrust all this upon her !
(" Nay, list,"—bade Kate the queen ;
And still cried the maiden, binding her tresses,
" 'Tis only a page that carols unseen
" Fitting your hawks their jesses ! ")

Ah! Jules well knows that story of the Queen who renounced the Crown of Cyprus, and the Page who longed to win her love, and yet felt so helpless to do anything to serve her. If she had been wronged, he could have avenged her; if she had been poor, he could have cloven the earth or parted the sea to find wealth to lay at her feet; but she needed nothing he could do or give, and so his love was robbed of power to affirm itself. Jules listens to the ballad, then looks at his bride, and begins to realise what a true love is,—not self-aggrandisement, but service; not getting everything, but giving everything; and here he has power to do everything to exalt this woman's soul just waking to life beneath his touch. Could Pygmalion renounce Galatea after his prayer had gifted her with a soul? Why, thinks Jules, this will be a finer vocation than his art:—

Shall to produce form out of unshaped stuff
Be art—and further, to evoke a soul
From form, be nothing? 'This new soul is mine!

Under this new impulse, he destroys every model in his studio, in order that he may begin life all afresh. A new soul wakes up within him under the power of this perfect love; he will take his bride to dwell with him in some distant island, where no echo of the old life of sin and suffering can ever come.

And you are ever by me while I gaze
—Are in my arms as now—as now—as now!
Some unsuspected isle in the far seas!
Some unsuspected isle in far-off seas!

In the fourth section of the poem, we find that the

Bishop is a patron of Jules; and he says he has received a letter from the young sculptor since his marriage, in which he declares his resolve to commence his work as an artist over again. Hitherto, he has only been a copyist of other men's ideals; now he will give up sculpture for painting, and seek to realise some living ideal of his own. In this way it is indicated that the self-forgetful love of Jules worked out his redemption both as a man and as an artist.

IV.

So Pippa passes, until she comes beneath the tower where Luigi and his mother are taking counsel together. At this time Italy is oppressed by Austria, and a conspiracy has been formed to assassinate the Austrian Emperor. The lot has fallen to Luigi to undertake this hazardous enterprise. He undertakes it with thankfulness, for he honestly believes that only by such a bold deed can his country be saved. His mother entreats him not to go; "you will be arrested," she says, "you will never escape." And then we have that exultant passage, in which Luigi says he is ready to die; for the few years of his life have been so blessed, that he has had his share of human joy, and must not complain if this solemn duty means his death:—

Escape—to even wish that, would spoil all !
 The dying is best part of it. Too much
 Have I enjoyed these fifteen years of mine,
 To leave myself excuse for longer life—
 Was not life pressed down, running o'er with joy,
 That I might finish with it ere my fellows
 Who, sparelier-feasted, make a longer stay ?

I was put at the board-head, helped to all
At first ; I rise up happy and content.
God must be glad one loves His earth so much !
I can give news of earth to all the dead
Who ask me :—last year's sunsets, and great stars
That had a right to come first and see ebb
The crimson wave that drifts the sun away—
Those crescent moons with notched and burning rims
That strengthened into sharp fire, and there stood,
Impatient of the azure—and that day
In March, a double rainbow stopped the storm—
May's warm, slow, yellow moonlit summer night—
Gone are they, but I have them in my soul !

Still his mother pleads. She reminds him that in a month his beautiful lady, his betrothed, will come to Asolo ; and will he be away when she arrives,—perhaps never to see her again ? It is clear that Luigi is hesitating. Yes, in June she was to come, he says,

We were to see together
The Titian at Treviso—there again !

He hears a sound which has been coming nearer and nearer for some minutes past ; now he can distinguish a childish voice and even listen to the very words. Pippa passes, with the rousing ballad of the king who lived long ago, in the morning of the world ; who, to extreme old age, sat upon his throne to do justice to the oppressed and execute judgment on evil-doers. "Such grace had kings when the world begun !" As the words strike his ear, Luigi thinks of the tyrant who disgraces the throne of Austria ; and he is ashamed that, for one moment, his patriotism should have cooled. He leaves his mother, crying :—

'Tis God's voice calls, how could I stay? Farewell!

And, in undertaking the duty, he escapes impending death: for Austrian spies are at that moment seeking him in the tower; if he had remained behind he would have been arrested and killed.

V.

Then Pippa passes to the palace, where the Bishop is arranging the affairs of his deceased brother, and we discover the element of "plot" in the drama. Pippa is the child of an elder brother of the Bishop; a wicked steward got rid of her in infancy, in order to accumulate wealth for himself. This infamous man is now explaining his plot to the Bishop. There is only Pippa's claim between him and the possession of enormous wealth; now, says the steward, if you will connive at my dishonesty, I will take care that the child is inveigled into some vicious class of wretched creatures, where she will be forgotten and soon must perish. And this priest, whom his little niece thought the one representative in Asolo of divine love and holiness, is actually listening, while the tempter suggests the damnation of a child's soul as a means of securing gold. He is hesitating, when Pippa passes with her song of the innocent babe, who was scarcely familiar with earth and sky before God took the little one safely to Himself. There is a strange weirdness in this song, it is like the cry of an infant spirit, flashing for a time into the world, and then suddenly fleeing for refuge again upon the breast of God.

Overhead the tree-tops meet,
 Flowers and grass spring 'neath one's feet ;
 There was nought above me, and nought below,
 My childhood had not learnt to know :
 For, what are the voices of birds
 —Ay, and of beasts,—but words—our words,
 Only so much more sweet ?
 The knowledge of that with my life begun !
 But I had so near made out the sun,
 And counted the stars, the Seven and One,
 Like the fingers of my hand :
 Nay, I could all but understand
 Wherefore through heaven the white moon ranges ;
 And just when out of her soft fifty changes
 No unfamiliar face might overlook me—
 Suddenly God took me !

As the Bishop listens, he realises the vileness of the crime with which he is temporising ; all his better nature asserts itself ; he throws the tempter off, and calls upon his people to arrest him.

My people—one and all—all—within there ! Gag this villain—tie him hand and foot ! he dares—I know not half he dares,—but remove him—quick ! Miserere mei, Domine ! quick, I say !

VI.

After this, we see Pippa passing to her bed-room and her flowers. She wonders how near she may have come to these people, whom she has imagined herself to be. "Ah," she says, "some of the silk I wind at the mill, to-morrow, may broider the robe of Ottima ;" and she knows not that the influence of her song has saved the lady's soul. As she undresses and goes to bed, she talks to herself :—

Now, one thing I should like to really know :
 How near I ever might approach all these
 I only fancied being, this long day !
 —Approach, I mean, so as to touch them, so
 As to—in some way—move them—if you please,
 Do good or evil to them some slight way.
 For instance, if I wind
 Silk to-morrow, my silk may bind
 And broider Ottima's cloak's hem.
 Ah, me and my important part with them,
 This morning's hymn half promised when I rose !
 True in some sense or another, I suppose,
 Though I passed by them all, and felt no sign.
 God bless me ! I can pray no more to-night.
 No doubt, some way or other, hymns say right.
 "All service is the same with God—
 With God, whose puppets, best and worst,
 Are we : there is no last nor first."

As we hear the dear child soothing herself to sleep with the words of her favourite hymn, and remember the high and holy service she has unconsciously rendered, we close the poem with these words of divine wisdom :
 "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast Thou ordained strength and perfected praise ; that Thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger."

The Return of the Druses.

The scene of this drama is a small island of the Southern Sporades, and the events are supposed to have taken place in the fifteenth century. The island is colonised by a tribe of Druses who have been driven by Turkish persecution from their home in Lebanon. The place is garrisoned by the Knights of Rhodes whose Prefect has exercised over the exiles the most

intolerable tyranny. Some time before the play opens the sheikhs of the tribe were slaughtered by this cruel governor; the child of one of those who perished in the massacre was rescued, and sent for safety to Europe. To this European experience of Djabal can be traced some of the most tragic elements in the story. The mingling in his nature of Eastern fanaticism and Western culture results in a spiritual conflict, which threatens to paralyse his will at the crises when instant activity is demanded. During a long absence from his tribe he has been brooding over its woes; fervid patriotism and religious zeal combine in his resolve, at all risks, to smite the tyrant and lead the Druses back to their old home in Lebanon. For this purpose a bold conspiracy is contrived; the aid of the Venetians is secured for its accomplishment, and ships are to be ready to carry the Druses to Syria, as soon as their emancipation is secured by the assassination of the Prefect.

During his European sojourn Djabal formed an intimate friendship with a young Breton named Loys de Dreux, who is now passing through his novitiate for membership in the Company of the Knights-Hospitallers of Rhodes; and though his assistance is relied upon when the great event arrives, he is not entrusted with the secret of the plot; indeed he is himself, all the while, using his influence at Rhodes to secure the removal of the despotic Prefect. When Djabal returns to his tribe to carry out the plot, he meets with Anael, a passionate maiden, whose soul is on fire with a consuming zeal for the redemption of her people. She is possessed by the hope, which long has animated their faith, that by a divine incarnation in a new Messiah

called "Hakeem," the Druses will triumph over their oppressors. The enthusiasm of Anael kindles in Djabal a feeling of fanaticism which, for a time, overcomes the mental sobriety of his Western culture; in order to inflame his tribe with resistless ardour he proclaims himself Hakeem, the Saviour of his race. Anael never entertains one doubt of the reality of his Messiahship; but Djabal's being is often rent asunder under the conflict between doubt of his divine authority and the patriotic resolution to employ even a delusion to accomplish a great and beneficent design.

ACT I.

The play opens with a scene in a hall of the Prefect's palace. Three Druses are already beginning to spoil the hall of its treasures, in greedy anticipation of the Prefect's assassination at noon of the day that is just dawning. There is a very swift transition from the patriotic exultation of the three men, in the opening lines, to their wretched haggling over the division of the spoil; it is clear that their religious fanaticism is not incompatible with the selfish pursuit of their own gain; and we feel a touch of irony as we remember that it is for such men as these that Djabal is willing to risk his life, and even to imperil his soul. And yet we cannot doubt the sincerity of the faith that speaks the proud boast of the Druse Nation as

Warders of our mount
Of the world's secret, since the birth of time.

As they are quarrelling for the possession of "three

hand-breadths of gold fringe," Khalil, brother of Anael and intimate friend of Djabal, enters, and reminds them of the solemn issues of the day's events; but though the greedy spoilers are moved by his words, they cannot restrain their feelings of jealousy that Khalil and his sister should be admitted to an intimacy with their chief which they are not allowed to share; it is personal ambition, they say, which prompts his zeal. Yes, he answers, it is ambition, but only to share the honour of facing the greatest danger; he has entreated Djabal, that his hand may smite the Prefect, when the fatal moment comes; but that deed the Master insists he must achieve himself before he reveals himself as the incarnate Hakeem.

Till noon

None see him save myself and Anael—once
The deed achieved, our Khalif, casting off
The embodied Awe's tremendous mystery,
The weakness of the flesh disguise, resumes
His proper glory, ne'er to fade again.

Upon this, messengers arrive to say that the Prefect has landed on the island accompanied by the Nuncio; for the Knights-Hospitallers are about to make the place an appanage of the Church, with the probable result that the Patriarch will be

Ardent to outvie

His predecessor in all wickedness.

This "one degradation more" will, however, in a few hours be made impossible by the assassination of the Prefect, the proclamation of the Hakeem, and the emancipation of the tribe from bondage. But one

matter somewhat dismays them ; they hear that Loys de Dreux has returned in the retinue of the Prefect ; Djabal had sent him away in order that he might escape the vengeance about to fall on the Rhodians, and now he is arrived at the very moment of imminent peril ! When the young Knight appears among the perplexed Druses the mutual misunderstandings are graphically depicted. He knows nothing of the impending rebellion, and they have no suspicion that he has pleaded their cause so well at head-quarters that the cruel Prefect is to be dismissed, while he, the friend of the oppressed race, is to be invested with the office. When the Druses leave, and Khalil seeks Djabal to inform him of his friend's unexpected arrival, Loys, in a monologue, speaks his joy in being able to save these people from oppression. He says that he could scarcely have dared to take the vow of celibacy as a Knight-Hospitaller, were it not for the hope of benefiting the race with which he feels such strange sympathy. Sometimes he can almost believe that wild story of Djabal's about an ancestor of his who grew so tired of a crusade that he joined the Druses, made himself one with their tribe, and "left his old name in Lebanon." Now his lot is embraced, however lonely it may be, he must endure it bravely, and find joy in the new life he brings to the island. And yet—— he remembers his love for Anael !

Long days

At least to spend in the isle ! and, my news known
 An hour hence, what if Anael turns on me
 The great black eyes I must forget ?

Why, fool,
 Recall them, then? My business is with Djabal,
 Not Anael! Djabal tarries: if I seek him?
 The Isle is brighter than its wont to-day!

ACT II.

We are now introduced to Djabal as he is rent by contending motives. The claim of Messiahship has become intolerable, and yet if he disavows that claim he renders his mission void. In his own thoughts he scorns the pretension to supernatural authority; nothing that he has done, nothing that he contemplates doing is beyond the power of a resolute human will; because he feels equal to a courageous action, why should he exalt himself as divine?—

That a strong man should think himself a God!
 I—Hakeem?

Indeed the course he has pursued, as he looks back upon it, appears far from godlike, and it is sheer folly to pretend that what he has done

Required, forsooth, no mere man's faculty,
 Nor less than Hakeem's.

What could be more human than the falsehoods he has sown and the frauds he has practised to gain his ends? He has even degraded himself by jugglery to play upon the credulity of his tribe. In Act I. Khalil reminds the Druses of the miraculous proofs of Djabal's mission:—

When suddenly rose Djabal in the midst,
 Djabal, the man, in semblance, but our God
 Confessed by signs and portents. Ye saw fire
 Bicker round Djabal, heard strange music flit
 Bird-like about his brow?

but here he confesses that all this was wretched trickery, which it would be blasphemy to suppose was practised by a God :—

Worst of all,
The gaining my tribe's confidence by fraud
That would disgrace the very Franks,—a few
Of Europe's secrets that subdue the flame,
The wave,—to ply a simple trade with these,
Took Hakeem ?

He longs intensely to strip himself of all pretence, and proclaim himself simply a man who has come to revenge his people and lead them back to Lebanon ; but he feels ; now impossible to untwist the thread of imposture which has become part of his life-work ; through all these years has "delusion mixed itself with his career." He thinks he will check the delusion before it spreads further ; he will call the select circle of his initiated disciples and tell them the whole of the story,—how feelings of revenge and patriotism made him eager to secure help for his race even by falsehood,—when falsehood alone would serve. And when he arrived on the Island, with the very succour which they anticipated from an incarnate god, was it not almost inevitable that he should announce himself as

The Khalif of a thousand prophecies,
Reserved for such a juncture,—could I call
My mission aught but Hakeem's ? Promised Hakeem
More than performs the Djabal ?

He thinks that after the disavowal of his supernatural authority, his friends will absolve him, when he proves

that he, the man, can do for them the very deeds which they expected from the god. He is rehearsing his words of confession :—

No Khalif,
But Sheikh once more ! Mere Djabal—not. . .

When, at that moment Khalil enters with the cry :—
“GOD HAKEEM.” Already the news has gone forth to the nation that their Divine Deliverer is come, in the fulness of the time, and that Djabal is an incarnate god ; the people only wait for him to appear to offer their adoration. Thus the man tries to rouse the chief to assume publicly the awful authority he has claimed, when, happening to mention Anael's name, Djabal starts, and remembers that it was through her inspiration that he almost persuaded himself that he was indeed the Hakeem,—that the deception was almost confirmed into a belief. Indeed, in that passionate woman's presence, he feels himself to be so exalted, that the human flashes up into the divine, and it seems only an expression of the state of his own emotional experience to proclaim himself the promised Saviour.

If I should prove indeed
Hakeem—with Anael by !

He decides that it is impossible to disillusionise the fanatical Druses ; but to the woman he loves he will confess everything, and she will help to guide him through the dangerous path he treads.

When Anael first appears, her mother Maani is dressing her in preparation for the manifestation of

bal in all the splendour of his supposed godhead. human feeling is in conflict with her religious h; she loves the humanity of Djabal with such aral passion, that she dreads to see him changed a supernatural form. She inquires of her mother the transfiguration will be accomplished;—will be able to recognise him, when every familiar ure changes into some celestial fashion? Then mother tells her how Djabal never claimed any-g, but human power until after that day when, the first time, he met with Anael, and heard her never to wed but one who saved her people; in solemn night, while “the moon seemed to ope shut, the while, above them both,” he revealed he aged woman the awful secret—

His mission was the mission promised us—
The cycle had revolved—all things renewing,
He was lost Hakeem clothed in flesh to lead
His children home anon.

el is exultant that she is the chosen of this divine iour, and yet, she confesses that she feels unworthy er election; for whenever he is by her she is so fied with the man that she fails to recognise the ; her worship fades, her awe disappears whenever approaches, and she asks for no more than the iliar environing joy of his human presence. She believe in his deity, but when she communes with it is his human nature alone that she can *feel*. As speaks Djabal enters; “why is it I cannot kneel ou?” she cries, as she gazes into the face of the osed Deity :—

For never seem ye
Never a God to me
Eye, voice!

Remembering how soon
come, she clings to her
put off his exaltation
for such an awful change
she cries, and with that
can she be fit to become
God?

While Anael speaks
deeply, how impossible
dash such a faith as
for its support to her
all the beautiful fabric
hope must be crushed if
be withdrawn.

'Tis not for my sake
I leave her soul this

In this agonising conflict
flee away from the scene
is ready for the emancipation
the Prefect's life is spared
departure under the Veil
redemption will always be
disappears it will be said
the moment when his
Anael will always retain
love, he will

Live in her memory
Above the world.

ending

There will be only one man who could possibly deceive her,—that is Loys, who knows too much of his human history ever to believe that he is an emanation of divine goodness; but Loys is disposed to stay safely at Rhodes, Anael and he will never meet again——when, as he thus imagines everything is provided for, Khalil comes in with the message

Loys greets thee!

Anael misunderstands the situation; she imagines that the fascinating young Breton who loves her will now be the test to prove how she will discern between the human and the divine; the agitation of Djabal when he hears of the approach of Loys, is misinterpreted by her as doubt of her religious fidelity; and instantly she resolves to do some dreadful deed to prove that she can violate her woman's nature under the stress of a supernatural zeal that shall prove her worthy to share the grace of Hakeem.

Loys? I take the trial! it is meet,
The little I can do, be done; that faith,
All I can offer, want no perfecting
Which my own act may compass.

ACT III.

In an interview with Anael, Loys betrays the passion which must so soon be forbidden by his vow of celibacy. Especially when she tells him that she can only love the man who saves her nation, he feels how nearly he has gained the greatest joy which life could give,—for is he not, that day, to ransom the Druses from oppression? But to Anael the interview has only one meaning,—it is a test of her worthiness

as the bride of Hakeem. As she compares Loys with Djabal, she can realise no infinite difference; she prefers the latter not because he is divine, but because, *as a man*, he seems superior to the Breton Knight. Now, she is resolved,—the dreadful deed she contemplates *must* be speedily accomplished, to prove that hers is more than a woman's love to a man, that it is the devotion of a worshipper to a god. As Loys leaves her she considers :—

Yes, I am calm now ; just one way remains—
 One, to attest my faith in him : for, see,
 I were quite lost else : Loys, Djabal, stand
 On either side—two men ! I balance looks
 And words, give Djabal a man's preference,
 No more. In Djabal, Hakeem is absorbed !
 And for a love like this, the God who saves
 My race, selects me for his bride ! One way !—

As Loys leaves, Djabal comes to bid farewell to Anael, for he still is resolute to leave the isle and free himself from the entanglements in which his pretensions have involved him. Anael imagines he is only leaving her because she is unworthy of exaltation by his side ; and this conviction strengthens her determination to do the deed she contemplates,—do violence to her natural feelings, and with her own hand to slay the Prefect ! We are made to realise the strain she is putting upon her gentle womanhood in the dreadful thoughts of death which haunt her mind :—

Death !—a fire curls within us
 From the foot's palm, and fills up to the brain,
 Up, out, then shatters the whole bubble-shell
 Of flesh, perchance !

fore the farewell is over, Khalil announces that the fatal hour is come; the Prefect is entering the palace, and if he is to be slain there must be no delay. It is too late, now, for escape; Djabal accepts his mission, giving Anael his signet-ring to be delivered, after the assassination, to Ayoob, that the Druses may be permitted to behold their fallen tyrant.

The Prefect is approaching the palace, in conversation with Loys. To the horror of the young Knight, he learns, for the first time, the perfidy of the sacred order he is about to join; he has been made a tool of by crafty men; and it is the interests of the Prefect that have been chiefly considered by the change of government in the Island. This revelation decides the noble-hearted young man to renounce his allegiance to Rhodes and throw in his lot with Djabal and his tribe. There is great dramatic power in the self-confidence with which the Prefect enters the chamber where, for so many years, his guilty conscience has made him fear some revengeful hand. Now, at last he can throw off that miserable dread of sudden assassination:—

This is the first time for long years I enter
Thus [*lifts the arras*] without feeling just as if I lifted
The lid of my tomb
. for the first time, no draught
Coming as from a sepulchre salutes me.

He disappears, the arras falls, and we know that he is gone to meet his death!

ACT IV.

Djabal is waiting for the Prefect; as soon as the arras is lifted he is ready with the sword to strike him down; he hears footsteps, the arras is dashed aside, and Anael appears! He entreats her to depart, for he says "*the Prefect comes!*" As the maiden hears those words the dreadful strain she has put upon herself breaks down, and she screams, for she knows that she has left the Prefect slaughtered upon the floor; she points to her bloody sword, and claims that the deed is not hers but Djabal's

When the command passed from thy soul to mine,
I went, fire leading me, muttering of thee,
And the approaching exaltation,—make
One sacrifice! I said,—and he sat there,
Bade me approach; and, as I did approach,
Thy fire with music burst into my brain:
'Twas but a moment's work, thou saidst—perchance
It may have been so! well, it is thy deed.

And now she waits for the exaltation she has surely merited by such a deed; now let Djabal flash forth the glory of Hakeem and reveal his godhead!

At last Djabal confesses that he is nothing more than a Man, resolute, even by a pious fraud, to work deliverance for his race. While the confession is being made, we notice how Anael's imagination is morbidly recalling every detail of her frightful deed,—a deed which now she hears was prompted by delusion. When the conviction of the delusion at last works itself into her brain, her first swift feeling is one of exultation that her lover is a man and not a god; she will go with him to expose the deception to the Druses,

and share with him the vengeance they will be sure to execute. "Come"—she says

To the Druses thou hast wronged ! confess,
Now that the end is gained—(I love thee now—)
That thou hast so deceived them—(perchance love thee
Better than ever !) Come, receive their doom
Of infamy ! Oh, best of all I love thee !
Shame with the man, no triumph with the God,
Be mine ! Come !

"No !" answers Djabal, "our hour of triumph is come, you and I together will appear godlike as we lead the tribe to their ancient home ; what matter the means by which so great a deliverance be wrought, if we can

By means
Of even their superstition, plant in them
New life !"

But the absolute sincerity of the maiden's nature revolts in indignation at such a course of deliberate imposture : all she answers is :—

Thou wilt feign Hakeem then ?

and leaves to denounce her lover to the Nuncio. The guards of the Nuncio seize Djabal as the Prefect's murderer, while to the horrified Loys there comes the exposure of his friend's imposture and conspiracy. While Djabal is being led away the news arrives that the Druses are in insurrection, and the score of guards know that resistance will be in vain ; the crowds outside the palace clamour for their leader to appear : he only hesitates to go forth because he is pondering who can be the traitor,—never thinking that the betrayal is the work of Anael.

ACT V.

The Nuncio is surrounded by his guards, who have great difficulty in protecting him from the infuriated Druses; the Prefect is dead, the Venetian ships are in sight; and as the hour of deliverance draws near the people's fanaticism is rising to fever heat. One final effort for safety is made by the Nuncio; he skilfully tries to persuade the Druses that they have been duped by their chief; Djabal is only a clever wizard who has deluded them by his spells, and if they will consult their own best interests they will desert such an unworthy leader, and place themselves under the protection of the Church which he represents. When Djabal appears he declares he will face all consequences, and bear the utmost malice of the Nuncio, if a single one of his followers can be found to accuse him. That is all that is needed to bring the climax; a veiled Druse is led in, the very one, they say, who betrayed the murder of the Prefect. Khalil, in ignorance of who the accuser is, drags the veil away, that the traitor may be face to face with the chief; and Anael stands discovered. This sudden stroke so works on the two lovers of the maiden, that they pour out their emotions in words which speak their inmost characters; they both claim her as their own. Loys cries:—

Djabal, stand forth!

Who's worth her, I or thou? I—who for Anael
Uprightly, purely, kept my way, the long
True way—left thee each by-path, boldly lived
Without the lies and blood,—or thou, or thou?
I! Love me, Anael! Leave the blood and him!

The speech of Djabal is a noble piece of verse, and indicates the ethnic mingling of the man's nature, which enters so deeply into the tragic story :—

And was it thou betrayedst me ? 'tis well !
 I have deserved this of thee, and submit.
 Nor 'tis much evil thou inflicttest : life
 Ends here. The cedars shall not wave for us :
 For there was crime, and must be punishment.
 See fate ! By thee I was seduced ; by thee
 I perish : yet do I—can I repent ?
 I, with my Arab instinct, thwarted ever
 By my Frank policy,—and, with, in turn,
 My Frank brain, thwarted by my Arab heart—
 While these remained in equipoise, I lived
 —Nothing ; had either been predominant,
 As a Frank schemer or as Arab mystic,
 I had been something ;—now, each has destroyed
 The other—and behold, from out their crash,
 A third and better nature rises up—
 My mere Man's nature ! And I yield to it :
 I love thee—I—who did not love before !

He then calls on Anael to pronounce his sentence by proclaiming the very truth she knows concerning him ; for, he says :—

I shall feel thy hand in it !
 O, luxury to worship, to submit,
 Transcended, doomed to death by thee !

All wait to hear the imposture of the man she loves denounced by the lips of Anael, but, in such a supreme moment, her passion for the man drowns her anger against the impostor ; by one last word she will atone for her betrayal. She utters the word of divine adoration :—

HAKHEM !

M

and with that redeeming lie upon her lips she falls dead at Djabal's feet.

That crowning act of human love effects as great a miracle as ever an Incarnate God could have achieved. That dying word is taken as attestation of Djabal's godhead, the Druses bend before him in worship; not even the wily Nuncio can stem such a torrent of religious zeal, and the redemption of the race is now secured.

Except in the passage where King Lear bends over the body of Cordelia, I do not know any more pathetic scene than that in which the pure-hearted Khalil entreats Djabal to restore Anael to life.

Save her for my sake!

She was already thine; she would have shared

To-day thine exaltation: think! this day

Her hair was plaited thus because of thee.

Yes, feel the soft bright hair—feel!

Just restore her to life!

So little does it! there—the eyelids tremble!

'Twas not my breath that made them: and the lips

Move of themselves. I could restore her life!

Hakeem, we have forgotten—have presumed

On our free converse: we are better taught.

See, I kiss—how I kiss thy garment's hem

For her! She kisses it—Oh, take her deed

In mine! Thou dost believe now, Anael?—See,

She smiles! Were her lips open o'er the teeth

Thus, when I spoke first? She believes in thee!

Go not without her to the Cedars, Lord!

Or leave us both—I cannot go alone!

I have obeyed thee, if I dare so speak:

Hath Hakeem thus forgot all Djabal knew?

Thou feelest then my tears fall hot and fast

Upon thy hand, and yet thou speakest not ?
Ere the Venetian trumpet sound—ere thou
Exalt thyself, O Hakeem ! save thou her !

Before the end comes, Djabal clears his soul by renouncing his claim ; but the dying word of Anael has more power than any denials he can make, and not even his protestations can extinguish the kindling zeal of the swaying crowd of Druses. He bids them pass on in their journey to their old home among the Cedars, and in solemn words of consecration ordains the faithful Khalil as their chief ; he says to the young leader :—

Thou art full of me—I fill
Thee full—my hands thus fill thee ! Yestereve,
—Nay, but this morn, I deemed thee ignorant
Of all to do, requiring words of mine
To teach it : now thou hast all gifts in one,
With truth and purity go other gifts !
All gifts come clustering to that ! Go, lead
My people home whate'er betide !

As the Druses still clamour for his Exaltation, he turns to Loys and commends his people to the care of the valiant Knight. Then nothing remains but to die at Anael's side, and find his Exaltation in the atonement of a sacrificial death :—

And last to thee !
Ah, did I dream I was to have, this day,
Exalted thee ? A vain dream—hast thou not
Won greater exaltation ? What remains
But press to thee, exalt myself to thee ?
Thus I exalt myself, set free my soul !

As his life is ebbing away, the Venetians arrive to

take the exiles home ; staggering under the support of Khalil and Loys he stands at the head of his rejoicing people, and with his expiring breath bids them :—

On to the Mountain ! At the Mountain, Druses !

THE END.

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